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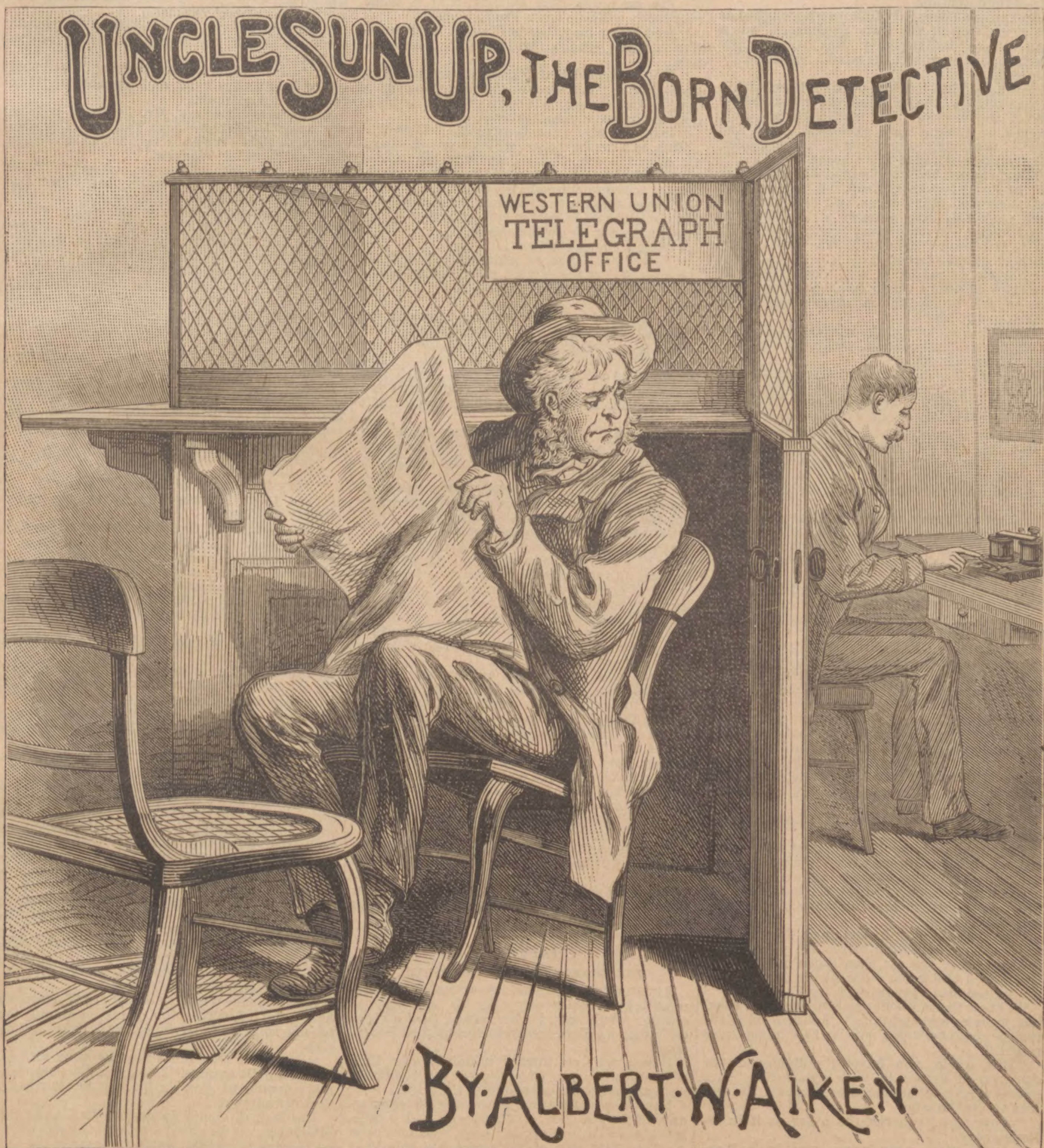
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THE TICKING WAS LIKE MUSIC TO HIS EARS, FOR UNCLE SUN UP WAS AN OLD OPERATOR.

Uncle Sun Up, THE BORN DETECTIVE;

OR,

BOODLE vs. BRACELETS.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,

AUTHOR OF THE "WOLVES OF NEW YORK,"
"JOE PHENIX, THE POLICE SPY," "THE
DEMON DETECTIVE," "THE BAT OF
THE BATTERY," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARRIVAL.

THE Chicago Express had rolled into the Grand Central Depot, New York City, and the passengers poured from it like a swarm of bees from a hive.

The train had been detained by an accident to a "Freight," so came into the city nearly five hours late; thus the passengers, instead of reaching the city early in the evening, did not arrive until near midnight.

It was a cross and angry lot of travelers therefore who emerged from the train, since, in many cases, the detention had greatly disarranged carefully-planned arrangements.

Only those careless souls, to whom it mattered not a whit when they reached the city, heeded not the detention.

And among these jolly fellows who laughed at the grumbling of the irate passengers, was a man whose individuality was so strongly marked that once seen he would not be easily forgotten.

He was a bluff-looking, portly fellow, with a face as round as the full moon, wherein twinkled two of the merriest blue eyes—eyes as keen, though, as ever a man possessed, clear and bright, surveying objects as if, like a gimlet, they could go straight to the heart.

The stranger had red hair and a red beard, no "auburn" tint about them, but fiery red, and both hair and beard were long and wiry, and each particular hair evinced a disposition to "go it alone," on its own particular hook.

The red-headed individual was not young; neither could he be called old, for he was in the very prime of manhood, and those posted in athletics certainly would have predicted that any one who tackled the stranger would have a "hard row to hoe."

The man was plainly, almost roughly, dressed, in clothes evidently chosen with a view to comfort rather than style.

He carried a small black bag, and his red locks were surmounted with a broad-brimmed, light-colored felt hat, of the pattern affected by the worthies who pose before an admiring world in the guise of scouts and Indian-fighters.

But the stranger evidently was not of this class; rather he looked more like a cattle-king, or comfortably-fixed stockman who visited the metropolis to enjoy the novel sights of the great city.

Be that as it may, whatever the stranger was he had kept his end of the smoker in an almost constant roar of laughter, during the journey, by his quaint sayings and his original way of expressing himself.

He was a fellow of infinite wit and full of the strangest and oddest jokes and stories.

Some of the curious passengers had made bold to ask his name.

"Well, sonny," he had replied to the first inquirer who was a rather fresh youth of the dude species, "in the parts whar I come from you can't 'most always generally tell 'bout a man's name, and it is the height of unpoliteness for to ax questions which may be apt to make a man feel uncomfortable, 'cos out in our parts we don't go much on name but a heap on the critter."

"A rose by any other name would amount to jist as much to a gal who was dying for a rose and didn't care a continental what its name was."

"Now, if you war to ax me what my name was afore I war married—"

There was a shout of laughter at this point, and the dude gladly sunk back to his native obscurity, while the speaker glanced around in simulated astonishment at the laughter, and when he turned to look at the young man he had disappeared.

Then the old fellow looked up at the car ceiling as though expecting to see the young man floating up in the air, then down at the floor, and peered under the seats, finally exclaiming:

"Melted into a grease-spot, by Jinks!"
"I knew there wasn't much to the little cuss, but, thunder and lightning! I didn't calculate that he could be wiped out like *that* in the fu'st round."

"But, uncle, you haven't enlightened the company in regard to your appellation," suggested a jovial drummer who occupied the end seat across the aisle.

"Appellation—your name, you know," explained the other.

"Show! You don't say so! Wa-al, now,

stranger, you kin take my boots if you didn't stampede me then, on the first try.

"But I say, neighbor, you don't want to go flinging your French around in that way, for to make us poor common folks feel mean."

This caused a laugh at the drummer's expense, but he was a man of cheek—could take a joke as well as give one, so returned to the attack:

"Never mind the French, uncle, but give us your name—your handle—"

"Bi-gosh! you hit me whar I live when you sling it at me in that way!"

"You make me feel like to hum when you throw good United States talk at me like that, like the Chicago man who fainted when he got out in the pure mountain air of Colorado, but when a dead and rayther elderly fish war h'isted ag'in' his nose he come to and allowed that it smelt like the town whar he was raised."

A party of Chicago men sitting just ahead had been boasting about the metropolis of the West which—

"Will beat New York, sir, all to pieces in the next twenty years."

This ancient joke brought forth a yell of laughter, in which the Chicago men could not help joining.

"But I say, capt'in, I reckon you must have run up ag'in' me afore, seeing as how you are so handy with your 'uncles.'

"'Cos when you yell *uncle* at me you hit a haystack about my size right plum in the center."

"I'm an uncle, sure enough; that is what everybody calls me when I'm to hum—"

"And where may that be?" asked an inquisitive stranger, joining abruptly in the conversation.

"Hol' on!" cried Red Whiskers, apparently in great alarm; "don't go for to shove things at a man in that manner! You're enuff to scare a man out of seven years' growth."

"Say, you won't give it away if I tell yer?"

This, in a loud whisper, which could be heard all over the car, though, and the big fellow leaned over as if he intended to make a confidential communication to the other.

All eyes were on the inquirer, who evidently felt uncomfortable, realizing that he was going to get a dig for his obtrusiveness.

"Oh, no," he mumbled.

"New York! I'm an alderman; but don't say a word, 'cos thar's a lot more pocket-books that I want to git away with afore I quit the car."

The laughter at this sally was hilarious, for the questioner really was an ex-alderman, and it had been whispered that, from being a poor man at the commencement of his term, he had grown to be a rich one at the end—which fact many in the car knew. With a muttered imprecation the man jumped from his seat and left the coach.

"By gosh! I reckon I hit that cuss in a tender spot!" the Westerner observed, with an air of comic dismay, as he watched the angry ex-alderman retreat.

"Wa-al, boyees, these leetle things *will* happen when you least 'most always don't generally look for the durned things to turn up."

"But to come back to our mutton:

"Out in the gelorious free air of the West, whar I live when I'm to hum, and no galoot of a sheriff is axing impudent questions 'bout me, everybody calls me 'uncle,' and even the yaller dorgs try to come as near it as they kin in their bark, when they take friendly bites out of the calves of my legs at night as a warning that they know a sheep-stealer or a hoss-thief as far as they kin smell 'em."

"And then, as I am the earliest man up, in our parts—some folks insinuate that I never go to bed if thar is anything that can be got away with in the neighborhood—the rest of my handle comes in as slick as goose-grease: Sun Up—Uncle Sun Up, from Mud Flats on the Big Muddy Fork of the Muddy River, in Ozark county, in the State of ole Missouri."

By this time the train was entering the depot, and the joking came to an end.

Uncle Sun Up seized his bag and left the train with the rest.

When he got outside the depot he halted irresolutely on the sidewalk, as if uncertain where to go.

Hackmen were to the front of him, cabmen to the right and left, but he paid no attention to their blandishments.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHARKS OF THE METROPOLIS.

AFTER a few moments' inspection of the surroundings he apparently "got his bearings," as a sailor would say, for he turned to the right and went up Forty-second street toward Broadway.

It was well on toward midnight—the time when the evil ones, who frequent the streets of a great city, are most watchful for prey.

Keen eyes had marked the countrified appearance of the stranger, and before he had gone a block a well-dressed young man, who had been on the other side of the street, but who had hastened ahead, crossed and came down so as to meet the man with the black bag face to face,

rushed up to him with outstretched hand exclaiming:

"Why, Mr. Jackson, I am delighted to see you! When did you come to town, and how did you leave all the folks in Kalamazoo?"

"Kalamazoo?" cried Uncle Sun Up. "What on earth are you getting at? My name *ain't* Jackson."

"Not John Jackson, of Kalamazoo—my father's old friend?" pretending great astonishment.

"Not by a jugful! My name is Jones—Martin Jones, and I am from Warsaw, New York. I'm in the cattle business."

"A thousand pardons, my dear sir, for the mistake; but you are the very image of Mr. Jackson, my father's friend."

And then the man retreated, and Uncle Sun Up went on toward Broadway.

The young man ran across the street and joined a stout, elderly-looking, well-dressed man, who was standing in a doorway where the light from a neighboring saloon window came full and strong.

There was a conference between the two; the stout man drew a small book from his pocket and examined it.

It was a condensed Business Directory of the United States.

Having secured the information he required the stout fellow hurried up the street and crossed, so as to intercept Uncle Sun Up.

The moment he caught sight of the Westerner the stout fellow gave a start and hurried forward with outstretched hand.

"Why, Mr. Jones, is it possible? I declare you are about the last man I expected to meet in New York!"

And all the while he was speaking he had hold of Uncle Sun Up's hand, and was shaking it in the warmest manner.

"You remember me, Mr. Jones, of course; my name is Perkins—Josh Perkins. I'm own cousin to Jim Perkins, President of the First National Bank of Warsaw."

"You know him, of course, certainly! Bless me, it seems as if when I was up in Warsaw the last time that Jim took me to see some stock of yours—some that you had or had sold to somebody else. I don't exactly remember the rights of the affair, for I have a poor head for that sort of thing, but I am great on names and faces, and I remembered you the moment I saw you."

"How are you? How's all the folks up at Warsaw? Let me see: you've struck salt up there now, haven't you? Got any stock in it? Wish I had some. Darn me, if I ain't glad to see you!"

By this time the fellow's breath was exhausted, and he came to a stop.

"Hol' on, stranger! You've made a leetle mistake in this hyer racket," Uncle Sun Up managed to say, now that the other was compelled to stop for want of breath.

"A mistake—how so?"

"My name *ain't* Jones."

"Not Jones?"

"Nary time, and I ain't from Warsaw!"

"Not from Warsaw!" exclaimed the other slightly bewildered.

"No, I only told the other fellow so; and, I say, how does the old thing work? Did ye—"

But the stranger waited to hear no more. With a muttered curse he hurried away.

Uncle Sun Up shouted after him:

"Hello! Come back and go through the hull racket! I'm just dying to be put through the paces."

But the "burco man" had no time to waste with that customer.

"I reckon I must look like a countryman," the red-bearded man remarked as he again resumed his onward course.

"Guess there must be some hayseed in my hair, judging from the way these fellows come at me."

"No nibble about that; it was a fu'st-class bite and no mistake."

By this time Uncle Sun Up had reached Sixth avenue, and as he halted for a moment on the corner to allow a street car to pass, two ragged street urchins stopped in front of him, called each other names for a second, then one challenged the other to mortal combat, and in a second they were "pitching onto" each other with the fury of wildcats.

Uncle Sun Up dropped his bag so that he might seize the lads by their collars for the purpose of separating them.

They struggled and pulled him off the sidewalk.

Then all of a sudden, one of them cried:

"Cheese it, cully, dere's a cop!"

Like eels they wriggled out of the Westerner's hands, darted across the street in among the passing cars and carriages, and were lost to sight.

"Durned if that don't beat my time all hollow, the little scamps," Uncle Sun Up observed; and turning to pick up his bag he discovered that it was gone.

The look of comic dismay on the face of the Missourian as he gazed down at the sidewalk, and then around him, would have made the fortune of a comedian upon the stage.

"I reckon that there is not only hayseed in

my hair, but hayseed all over me," he exclaimed.

"Wa-al, that is about the cutest trick I ever saw worked; and to think, too, that I was taken into camp by boys when I played it on the bunco men so neatly," for the Westerner understood that the fight between the boys had been prearranged. They had calculated that he would drop his bag for the purpose of separating them, while a third boy behind him was ready to make off with the plunder.

"The trick was well played, but I reckon the kids will be awfully disgusted when they come to examine the contents of the bag, and as for the bag itself, if that's a pawnbroker in town who will give a quarter for it he is a more liberal man than I ever stuck in that line.

"Let me see, whar had I better roost, to-night?"

And the Westerner gazed around him as he put the question.

"I tell yer, this hyer Broadway ain't much like it used to be, twenty odd years ago. Thar was no elevated road then, or anything of that kind, and mighty few of these big palace-like buildings were hyar. Thar's a heap of hotels round yere, but as I don't know anything about them I guess I will fall back on the old Metropolitan.

"That used to be one of the big hotels in the old time, and I reckon it holds its own now. Sich concerns generally do, so that ranch will do as well for me as any shebang in the town."

Getting into a car he was speedily transported to the neighborhood of the hotel.

Quitting the car at Prince street he started to walk through Prince to Broadway.

Prince street at midnight is a lonely and dismal thoroughfare.

Uncle Sun Up, though, busy in his own thoughts, did not take any particular notice of the fact, but strode onward toward Broadway. Evidently he was well acquainted with the city's streets, for he went on his way without hesitation.

No thought of danger was in his mind, and he was not particularly on his guard, but for all that he was not taken unawares when a dark figure sprung out at him from a deep doorway just before he reached Mercer street and aimed a blow at his head with that murderous weapon—the sand-club; but throwing up his arm and ducking his head the alert Missourian escaped the blow, and before the assailant could recover himself the Westerner was on him with the spring of a panther, and grasping the astonished footpad by the throat bore him over backward, and down went the two in the obscurity of the very doorway where the marauder had been concealed.

The clutch of the Westerner was like a vise, and soon it choked the writhing ruffian into senselessness, and then for the first time Uncle Sun Up got a look at the face of his assailant.

"Great Scott!" he cried, "it is Tom La Porte!"

CHAPTER III.

ECHOES FROM THE PAST.

SUN UP released that terrible grasp the moment he made the discovery in regard to the man's identity.

"Wa-al, wa-al, of all the strange things!" he muttered. "About the last chap in the world I expected to see. I thought Tom was dead years and years ago! But some folks can't die; they are too p'isoned wicked. Tom was about as bad as they make 'em; but I never expected to see him come down to anything of this kind."

And taking a scrutinizing look at the man he saw that he was miserably dressed, and his pale, pinched and wan features betrayed that the world had not gone well with him lately.

"Now, this yere is what I call a piece of downright good luck," Uncle Sun Up murmured. "Hyar I have been wondering who I would get to post me about how things have gone since the old days—since I have been wandering in the wilds of the West, and up pops in my path the very identical individual who kin tell me all I want to know.

"Oh, I tell you now, this hyer is good, hard hoss-luck and no mistake. But I must pull my pard into the darkness and prop him up ag'in' the door, so that if any stray policeman passes this way he won't take it into his head to stop and ask any impudent questions."

This was no sooner thought of than performed.

"Gracious! I hope I haven't choked the life out of the critter!" Uncle Sun Up remarked, as he propped the other up in the corner, but the speech had hardly escaped him when the man began to betray signs of returning animation.

"Now, then, we shall soon see what we will see!" thought the Westerner.

"Mebbe he won't feel inclined to talk. If he don't I shall have to choke him some more.

"And, by the by, who am I in this b'iling, anyway?" and Uncle Sun Up cogitated for a moment.

Suddenly he nodded his head as he muttered:

"Yes, yes, that will do the trick right up to the handle.

"I'm Gil Featherstone, the second porter, a good deal changed of course, but then such a thing as that is to be expected in twenty odd years."

The man breathed hard, gave a gasp, then opened his eyes.

"Wa-al, pard, how do you think you feel now?"

The footpad's eyes blinked like those of an owl brought suddenly into the sunlight as he tried to make out what the situation was. Then, as all that had happened came to mind, he was the alert rogue again.

"Say, what is your little game?" he demanded, in a hushed voice.

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Uncle Sun Up, in his jolly way; "you think I am up to some leetle game, do you?"

"Bet my life on that!" the other responded, doggedly. "Cos if you wasn't you would have yelled for the peelers and the cops would have had me 'run in' afore this."

"Bi-gosh, you argue jest like a lawyer!" exclaimed Uncle Sun Up, in evident admiration.

"Well, I ought to be able to; I've seen enough of 'em in my time."

"Ho, ho, ho! That's a joke; ain't it? May I be dod-rotted if you ain't the most amusing cuss I have come across for a month of Sundays."

"Say! do you know you pretty near choked the life out of me?" the other demanded, in an injured sort of way, as he put up his hands and felt of his neck.

"Wa-al, who begun the row, anyway? Didn't you go to hit me over the head with that sausage, and do you s'pose I am the kind of rooster to allow such a liberty as that to be taken with me? Not much! If a man knocks me down with an honest club I ain't the galoot to grumble; a club is a recognized weapon of warfare; but when it comes to basting me over the head with a sausage, then my name is Jim Jones, the tinker, and I am all fight from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot!"

"Oh, your name is Jim Jones, eh?"

"Nary time! But, I say, Tom La Porte, you ought to know me!"

The startled footpad peered anxiously in the face of the other, but in the semi-darkness the scrutiny did not avail him much.

"How do you know that is my name?" he demanded, in a sulky and surprised way.

"Why, I am an old pard of yours."

"I don't remember you."

"Mebbe not, and that ain't the leastways wonderful either, for it's over twenty year since we saw each other."

Again the footpad peered into the face of Uncle Sun Up, and again he shook his head.

"I don't remember to have ever seen you before."

"Don't I tell you that I have changed, old man? I was only a boy, then, as you were jest a-stepping on the threshold of manhood, you know. I reckon you ain't forgot the firm of Wellraven and Wellraven, importers and jobbers in teas, an'-so-forth, and an'-so-forth, who held out in Broad street in this hyer busy New York twenty odd years ago?"

Again the man started, evidently taken completely by surprise.

"Oho! I hit you whar you live *that* time," Uncle Sun Up chuckled.

"You were a clerk with that firm, and by the same token I was a porter, not the head fiend, you understand, but an assistant."

"Come, brush up your memory and I reckon you kin call to mind Gil Featherstone."

"Oh, yes, I remember that there was a young fellow by that name in the store, but you don't look a bit like him."

"I'm the same two-and-sixpence though, but of course twenty years have fixed me so I don't look much as I used to.

"In those days I was a thin, lanky chap, and a hundred and twenty-five was about my weight, but the wild life of the West has filled me out, and I can kick the beam at two hundred now. But, I say, you ain't changed much; you are older of course, but you look about the same—kinder wolfish though, as though the world hasn't agreed very well with you."

"And it hasn't," the other snarled. "I've been hounded through life until I am reduced to this extremity in which you found me to-night, to take to the street as a robber and risk the State Prison so that I may pick up a living."

"Hard lines—hard lines—the hardest kind of lines!" Uncle Sun Up declared, with a doleful shake of the head.

"But, it might be worse, for if I hadn't happened to get a look at your face, and recognized you when you tackled me, I would have called the police after I got the best of you, and by this time you'd be in way of going up to Sing Sing for a long term."

"Yes, I know that."

"And then, too, though I ain't a millionaire, yet I have made my stake out in the West and I am not the man to see an old pard suffer."

"You allers treated me well in the store, and durn me if I won't help you out of this hyer scrape now."

The face of the other brightened.

"Will you, though?"

"You bet yer boots I will, and that is the kind of man I am."

"But, I say, let's get out of this, and go to some shebang whar we kin get something to eat and have a talk over old times. We'll have a rouse, bi-gosh, and durn the expense."

"Wharabouts 'round hyer do they keep good whisky?"

The dull blue eyes of La Porte brightened at the mention of liquor, and Uncle Sun Up chuckled as he noticed it.

"Oh, ho, ho," he cried, "you ain't afeard of a little good stingo, I see."

"It has been the ruin of me, but I can't live without it," the other responded, gloomily.

"Love your enemies," that's Scripture, and a heap of men act onto to it as far as whisky is concerned. But, I say, do you know a ranch whar we kin get a private room so we kin talk at our ease?"

The other nodded.

"Yes, there's an all-night place on Houston street whar we can be accommodated."

"Let's vamose then. Don't forget your sausage."

The two left the doorway and proceeded up the street to Broadway, then up the great avenue to Houston where La Porte piloted the Westerner to one of those saloons peculiar to large cities and known as "All-nighters."

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE STORY.

It was a rather dingy-looking place—drinkin'-bar and supper-room combined.

The saloon was in the front, a bar and small table for the accommodation of card parties opposite, and in the rear were a half-dozen small eight-by-ten rooms where refreshments could be served and the parties not exposed to the gaze of passers-by.

La Porte was evidently well known to the saloon men and the regular patrons of the place, a half-dozen of whom were in the bar-room when the pair entered, for all of them nodded to the guide as he passed through.

Many were the curious glances directed at the stranger, who was immediately spotted by these shrewd and evil-eyed men as a country-man.

Uncle Sun-Up apparently took no particular notice of the place or the inmates as he followed the guide through the saloon, but for all that not a thing escaped him.

"Crooks, every mother's son of them!" he muttered, under his breath.

"And this is a reg'lar thieves' paradise! I hope my gentle Thomas ain't got ary idee of playing roots on his uncle, for if he tries on any sich game the choking that I gave him on the street won't be a circumstance to the way I will go for him."

But after they had entered the little room, taken seats and given their order to the waiter—"A sirloin steak for two and the best bottle of whisky that you have got in the shebang!" was Uncle Sun-Up's command—the Westerner's suspicions were removed and he saw that his companion intended to act fairly by him, for the moment they were alone La Porte proceeded to enlighten his companion in regard to the character of the place.

"This is no first-class shop, you know, but a dive, and the men upon whose patronage it lives are fellows with shaky reputations."

"The police are pretty well acquainted with all of 'em, I s'pose?"

"Yes; that is about the size of it."

"No danger of their going for me, I reckon?" and the Westerner grinned as though he would consider it a fine joke if such a thing was meditated.

"Oh, no; there isn't much business done in the saloon. The proprietor won't allow it, unless it is some trick that can be worked so quietly that there isn't the least danger there will be any row kicked up."

"But it is a general loafing-place for men who have been in 'trouble;' I suppose you understand what that means?"

The other nodded.

"I ain't so green as I look if I do smell of cows!"

"The reason I came here is that the man who keeps it is a good fellow, and any man whom he knows to be all right is welcome to loaf in the saloon when he is down on his luck and he won't see a fellow starve as long as the lunch-counter holds out."

"So when I can throw any money in his way I do it."

"That's right! help the man who helps; that is both law and Gospel!"

"But I say, how is the old firm and the boys that used to work there when you and I did? If you remember, I quit about twenty-odd years ago. I got a good chance to go out West and I jumped at it like a trout for a hungry grass-hopper, for I reckoned it would make a man of me."

"I wish I had gone West, or somewhere out of New York, twenty years ago," the other remarked, in a gloomy way.

"Oh, well, we never can tell aforehand, you know."

"As the parson chap said, if a man's foresight was only equal to his hind-sight, what a big thing it would be."

The other nodded assent.

"Lemme see, there were the two old Wellravens, Jerome and Sidney—"

"Both dead!"

"You don't tell me?"

"Yes, and been dead for ten years. Sidney—he was the younger of the two, the old bachelor who was so particular—"

"Oh, I bet yer! I remember him well. He was going to give me the sack once 'cos I left some peanut-shells out by the door, ho, ho, ho!" and the jolly old fellow laid back in his chair and laughed as if the remembrance was extremely funny.

"Sidney died first, and by his will all his property went to Jerome, but with the proviso that the firm name was still to be Wellraven and Wellraven."

"Yes, he was allers very proud of the business which the firm had built up. I allers liked him the best of the two, although he was so durned particular."

"Now Jerome I never took much stock in, for he had a nasty way with him—he was kinder like a snake and thar wasn't never no telling when he would turn on yer; so was his son Benoni, too."

"He is a hound of hell!" the other cried, his face distorted with anger.

"Hello, hello! what's bit you?"

"That infernal scoundrel ruined my life! If it had not been for him I would have been a decent member of society to-day instead of the miserable outcast that I am."

"You don't mean Benoni?"

"Yes, the man who is now a millionaire ten times over, I suppose, for he inherited all the wealth of both his father and uncle—it all came to him at last."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, when Jerome died, ten years ago, his son inherited all. Then he wound up the concern and retired from business."

"Got a palace on Fifth avenue, I suppose?"

"No, he lives out in Westchester at a place called Orienta, on the Sound; got a stone castle out there, a sort of English Park place—cost a million, they say."

"Bi-gosh, that's style!"

"Yes, and if the miserable hound had his deserts he'd be in State Prison to-day!" cried the other, with bitter accent.

"Lemme see, you was a clerk, wasn't you?"

"Yes."

"And thar was a couple more besides you and Benoni, but I declare to goodness I reckon their names have slipped me."

"Thar was a kinder of a fat-faced, cheeky cuss, great on shirking his work and dead gone on theaters and hoss-races, and all kinds of devilry."

"Yes, Ben Wellington, and he was another scoundrel," La Porte responded, bitterly.

"He, too, had a hand in making me the wreck that I now am."

"Wa-al, how has the world used him?"

"As well as though he was the best man in the world. He, too, is reputed to be a millionaire, although no one knows how he made his money; speculating in Wall street in the stock market, they say, but I don't believe that, for he never had any head for such business."

At this point the refreshments arrived, and the two men attacked the viands vigorously, still keeping up their conversation though.

"I wouldn't have reckoned that he could make a fortune in that way."

"Well, he's got the money, however he made it. He lives about a mile from Wellraven, and has a splendid place on the Sound."

"Rye Neck is where his place is situated I believe."

"And the fourth clerk—lemme see—what's his name?"

"Chris Chadbourne."

"Yes, that's it, young Chris; he was a pretty good sort of fellow."

"He was shot while attempting to escape from the prison at Sing Sing about twenty years ago."

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, he made a bold dash for liberty, but was shot in the water."

"Poor cuss."

"And he was Benoni's victim."

"You don't say?"

"Yes, there were heavy stealings going on in the store. Benoni and Wellington were pals, and did the job."

"Then when discovery seemed likely they roped me into the thing. I altered the books so that it appeared as if it was Chadbourne who had made away with the cash."

"Benoni gave me a big sum for my work, and promised to make me a partner when he got the business."

"I was fool enough to be tempted into crime. I did the work according to his orders, but when the explosion came I was thunderstruck to find that I also appeared to be a thief."

"Caught in your own trap, eh?"

"Yes, and the trick was so skillfully planned that in spite of all I could do both Chadbourne

and myself were convicted and sent to Sing Sing."

"I was not fool enough to risk my life by attempting to escape and served my time out. I came forth a broken man, and have lived the miserable life of a rogue ever since."

"If you hadn't been such an expert penman, able to imitate anybody's hand, you wouldn't have got into the trouble."

"Very true, my gift was my ruin."

"And I believe Chadbourne had a wife too and a babby—or was it you who had the wife and babby?"

"No, it was Chris. All four of us young fellows were after the same girl, and though it looked dollars to cents that Benoni, with his brilliant prospects, would win her, yet she preferred Chadbourne and married him. That was one thing that young Wellraven had against Chris, and I know he thirsted for revenge."

"What ever became of the wife and babby?"

"They disappeared and no one knows where they went."

"Mighty strange, eh?"

"Yes, when I came out of prison I tried to hunt the girl up—Margaret Chetwood was her maiden name; she was an English girl and an orphan; but I couldn't find the least trace of her. She had disappeared as utterly as though the earth had opened and swallowed both her and her child."

"Do you s'pose Benoni knew anything about her?"

"Oh, no; that ain't likely. He had married by this time—married some great heiress from out West, and of course he wouldn't care to trouble his head about his old flame."

By this time the pair had finished the steak, and had also paid their respects in a liberal manner to the liquid refreshments.

"Wa-al, old feller, I am durned glad to meet you, I am, bi-gosh," the jolly Westerner declared.

He had not neglected the whisky, but the liquor did not seem to have the least effect upon him, while La Porte plainly showed evidence of its power.

"For my part I am not sorry to have fallen in with you, for you are the only friend that I have run across in years."

"Wa-al, as I said afore I ain't the richest man in the world by a jugful; but I've got a leetle cash salted away, and for the sake of old times I will do what I can for you."

"Mebbe if you have a fair shake and git a good ready on you kin brace up and be somebody yet."

"Perhaps so, but I have never had much chance."

"I'm staying at the Metropolitan; drop round there to-morrow morning and see me. Hyer's a twenty-spot to rig yourself out decent."

"You would have done something for the wife and babby, would you? Wa-al, now, thar's a good streak in you, anyhow."

This ended the interview.

La Porte walked with the Westerner as far as the corner of Broadway and there they parted—the outcast going up the avenue and Uncle Sun Up down toward his hotel.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE RIVER.

THE night was not a warm one, but after Uncle Sun Up parted from his companion and walked down the street the atmosphere was so oppressive that he was compelled to take off his broad-brimmed hat and fan himself with it as he proceeded.

"Bi-gosh, this is either the hottest night I ever struck or else I am powerfully excited!" he muttered, as he walked leisurely along.

His red face was redder than ever, and each particular hair of his beard seemed to stand on end.

"Whew—whew! It is powerful—or mebbe I ain't quite correct in that statement."

"It is this yer old Uncle Sun Up who is powerful hot."

"Lemme see! Darned if I care to go to bed—I shouldn't sleep a wink and I should suffocate. I know I should."

"Let me get a weed and I'll keep right straight on down to the Battery, and thar the salt breeze from the bay, mebbe, will cool me off a bit."

Acting on this idea Uncle Sun Up went into a cigar-store which happened to be open and procured a dollar's worth of cigars.

Lighting one he continued on his way down the street, an object of interest to every one whom he encountered on account of his wild Western appearance.

"Lemme see—lemme git everything clear in my head so I will know how the range lies. First and foremost, both of the old partners are dead and all the money that the firm made—a mighty big sight it was, too, for they did the biggest business in their line in the city—is in the hands of Benoni Wellraven, the biggest skunk of a man that ever walked the airth."

"That's chapter number one, for the yarn is so durned long that I must reckon it off into chapters, so as to divide it up, and then I won't be apt to miss any of the points."

"Chapter two, four clerks in the Wellraven house; Benoni Wellraven the eldest, Benjamin Wellington next, then this poor miserable critter, Tom La Porte, and lastly, Christopher Chadbourne, light-hearted, merry Chris, everybody's favorite, who never wronged a human being and was as innocent and trusting as a child."

"Chapter three. Benoni is now the retired merchant, a millionaire, ten times over. Ben Wellington too is wealthy, although nobody knows where he got his money."

"These two are living in luxury, surrounded, of course, with all the comforts that money can buy, living like princes."

"Tom La Porte is a poor, homeless wretch, an ex-Sing Sing bird, depending upon the precarious result of a life of crime to get the means wherewith to live, and with the chances about a thousand to one that he will die in a prison cell unless some one comes to his aid."

"Honest Chris Chadbourne was sent to State Prison for another man's crime, and met a cruel death while attempting to escape from the living hell that Sing Sing must be to a man possessed of the instincts of a gentleman."

"His wife and child have disappeared; no one knows what has become of them."

"Is there a God in heaven who can permit such crimes to go unpunished?"

And as the Westerner put the question he tore off his hat and glared up at the sky, as though he expected that the question would be immediately answered.

But the silver queen of night—the round full moon sailing in all her glory through the blue heavens beamed down as benignantly as though there was no such thing as crime and wrongdoing in the world.

"The rogues lolling in the lap of luxury, one of their victims, a wretched outcast, and the other dead with the stain of prison-cell and the striped-suit upon him, and his wife and child cast helpless upon the cold mercies of a cruel world."

"Bi-gosh! it is almost enough when a man sees sich things have happened to make him turn infidel and believe that thar ain't no sich thing as justice in this hyer world!"

Then he jammed his hat on his head again, and strode onward for a minute as though he was engaged in a foot-race, his strong teeth closing down so violently upon the cigar as to bite the end off.

"Hello, hello! I mustn't be so durned keerkless of what I am a-doing!" he exclaimed, as he halted to pick up the cigar which had fallen to the pavement.

He touched a fresh cigar to the glowing end of the one which he had so ruthlessly destroyed, and then put it into his mouth and cast the now useless weed away.

"I reckon I am a leetle hasty; the world ain't quite so bad as a fellow is apt to think when he don't take the trouble to look well inter the thing."

"The race is not allers to the swift nor the battle to the strong," that's Scriptor', and Scriptor', according to the parson sharps, is allers pretty generally nearly correct, you bet your boots."

"Benoni Wellraven and Benjamin Wellington, two of the biggest scoundrels that ever lived since the world began, are now enjoying their innings."

"They have made the raffle, the game is theirs, and it now looks as if all they had to do was to lay back and enjoy themselves."

"But every dog has his day, and mebbe light-hearted Chris Chadbourne will have his, although he is dead and buried, and, of course, without any stone to mark whar he lies."

"Oh, it is a mighty tangled skein, but I reckon I'm the boy to straighten it out."

"I ain't a millionaire, but I've got some rocks and some knowledge too which, in a case of this kind, counts like thunder, and I reckon I will be able to play so strong a game that this precious pair will have cause to regret the day when I started on their trail, for all the money and influence they have."

Then for quite a time Uncle Sun Up paced on in silence, his mind busy in thought though.

The cigar was finished, a fresh one lighted and still the tireless tramp continued.

When he arrived at the corner of Chambers street he halted for a moment.

"I want to go down to the Battery—I'll jest go down to the East River and take that boat that runs to Williamsburg and then I'll come back by the way of Grand street."

"That will be a nice trip and will cool me off, I reckon, though I do declare I feel as if I had a furnace inside of me."

So along Chambers street he went into New Chambers street, and thence to the river where he boarded one of the ferry-boats of the Williamsburg line.

It is an old saying that "from little events great consequences do rise," and the mere fact that, on the whim of the moment, Uncle Sun Up determined to take a sail on the East River instead of going to the Battery as he had originally intended, was to be productive of important events.

There were very few passengers on board of

the boat, for at such an hour there is little traffic on the river.

Uncle Sun Up took a position on the rear of the boat near the gentlemen's cabin, and leaning over the rail puffed away at the cigar, while he watched the moonbeams play on the water.

When the boat had covered about half the distance which she had to go, the cigar which the Westerner was smoking became exhausted, and as in his abstraction Uncle Sun Up did not notice the fact until the lighted end came near setting fire to his bristling mustache, then in a hurry he cast the butt into the water.

"Bi-gosh! that was a fool piece of business," he exclaimed regretfully the moment the action was performed.

"Now I shall have to use a match for the next weed."

The Westerner was not much of a smoker as a rule, but on this night the tobacco seemed to be grateful to him.

In order to light the cigar he had to retire to the corner near the cabin, and as this was dark he was hidden from observation.

Just as he reached the nook and felt for a match, his attention was attracted by the peculiar behavior of a woman, who came out of the ladies' cabin on the other side of the boat.

She was dressed in dark clothes, and wore a close veil over her face.

Her slight, graceful figure seemed to indicate that she was young in years.

After she came out of the cabin, she stood motionless for a moment and glanced around her, as if anxious to see whether there was any one near who could observe her.

There wasn't a soul on the rear part of the boat excepting Uncle Sun Up, and he being in the shadow escaped the girl's observation.

With a deep sigh the girl—for it was plain she was quite young—hastened to the stern of the boat, stepped over the chains and advanced to the very end of the craft.

"Oh, Father in heaven, have mercy on me!" she cried as she clasped her hands and prepared to leap into the foaming waters.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GIRL'S STORY.

BUT she did not leap, for the moment she uttered the supplication and prepared to make the plunge before she could accomplish the desperate resolve, Uncle Sun Up had leaped over the chains, and placed a heavy hand on her shoulder.

"Hello, hello, little gal! What on airth are you a-going to do?"

The girl turned an affrighted face upon the questioner.

She had thrown up her veil preparatory to the plunge, so the Westerner was able to see her face.

And it was a beautiful one.

She was a brunette with great hazel eyes that appeared to be black a short distance off.

An oval face with features as perfect and regular as ever sculptor carved out of silent marble.

She was no common girl, but a lady both by birth and breeding.

And why should such a beautiful creature—for she was as perfect in form as in face—wish to destroy the life that God had given?

"Oh, sir, please let me go!" the girl pleaded.

"Not by a jugful."

And as he spoke he passed his arms around the slender waist of the girl and lifting her in his strong arms without the least trouble, carried her over the chains to the rear of the ladies' cabin, where he set her down upon her feet again.

"Oh, sir, please don't!" she exclaimed in a low suppressed voice, evidently afraid of attracting attention.

But there was very little danger of that, for there wasn't any one in the rear part of the ladies' cabin.

"Don't you be afeard, little gal," Uncle Sun Up remarked, kindly.

"I ain't a-going to hurt you, and I am going to take durned good care that you don't hurt yerself."

"Going to make a hole in the water, wasn't you? Wa-al now, it strikes me that 'air is about the worst thing you kin do."

"Oh, no, I don't want to live," she replied with a world of mournful meaning in her voice.

"Shoo! you don't tell me!" he exclaimed and his face expressed great astonishment.

"Why, what on earth is the matter?—a young and pretty gal like you ain't got no call to be sick of this hyer bright and beautiful world."

"Now, if it was a rough old chap like me what was sick of being knocked about, thar might be some sense in it."

"Life has no charms for me."

"Is that a fact?"

"It is."

"Wa-al, young lady, all I've got to say is that it beats my time. What will your folks say?"

"I haven't any."

"No folks?"

"Not one in this wide world."

"That is pretty bad I will allow; still I don't see as that is any reason why you should go for to want to make a hole in the water."

"If you had folks and they were like some people I know, that might be a good excuse for not wanting to live, but to drown yourself because you ain't got any folks is jest nonsense."

"But I am utterly without money or friends, I do not know where to go, I am not able to support myself—what can I do?"

"Wa-al, you kin do *something*, of course; all women kin do something—some kin sew and some kin play on the pianny, and some kin cook—thar's a living for every girl if she only has pluck enough to try to do something."

"But I do not want to live—I am so utterly miserable," she replied.

"That is 'cause you feel a leetle blue—but you'll git over that and then you'll be apt to laugh at the idee that you wanted to shuffle off this hyer mortal coil and try a fresh deal with a new pack, as the poet says."

"I know how it is; I have been thar myself. I have been so 'tarnel sick of life that I would have been willing to have swapped myself off for a yaller dorg and then kicked the dorg for being sich a fool as to git swindled in the bargain."

By this time the boat was running into the slip, and the old Westerner noticing it, remarked:

"Say! leetle gal, hyer we air at Williamsburg. Is thar anywheres hyer that you want to go? 'cos if you do, spit it out and I'll take you."

"I'm a-kinder laying round loose and ain't got anything to do with myself, so jest say the word and I'll be yer beau."

"You might pick up a heap sight better-looking galoot than I am, but I'm honest, and that is more than you kin say of every fine-looking chap you run across."

"Oh, yes, I feel sure of that, and I am not afraid to trust myself in your hands."

"Right you air, and you kin bet all you will ever be wuth in this world that you ain't making any mistake either."

"I'm rough as a badger and as rude as a bear's back, but I'm all clear white, clean through—all wool, a yard wide, and warranted to wash!"

Despite the girl's agitation she could not forbear smiling at the comic manner in which Uncle Sun Up spoke.

"I am not in the least afraid, but I do not know any one here."

"In New York mebbe?"

"No, nor in New York."

"Where then? You must have friends *some-where*?"

"No, no, I haven't; and that is the reason I wanted to die; I am not fit to live!"

And at this point the girl's tears began to fall thick and heavy.

"Come, come, don't cry, little gal!" the Westerner said, in the most soothing of tones, just as if the young woman was a child.

"Take my arm, and we'll walk up the street; mebbe you kin tell me your trouble and I kin be of some assistance to you."

Then the rattle of the chains told that the boat was being secured to the bridge.

"Thar, we must git out of this," Uncle Sun Up observed. "Jest you hook right on to my arm and we'll walk up the street and talk this matter over."

"I reckon that thar is a heap sight of things that you kin do better than to go overboard into the muddy water."

"I ain't got no very great opinion of water, anyway; good enuff for a fellow to wash in, but that is about all the use I've got for the stuff."

"You see, miss, I'm a good deal like the chap who went to California in the early days of the gold-fever, and when he came hum all his folks were anxious to know about the climate, and what the soil was good for, and the chances for making money."

"He answered every question until the old doctor of the family asked him how the water was."

"That stumped him."

"By George," sed he, 'I never drank any!'"

And then the Westerner haw-hawed as if he had given utterance to the finest joke possible.

His wonderful flow of animal spirits, though, had its effect upon the girl, and though she couldn't see anything very laughable in the jest, yet she smiled because he did.

The two quitted the boat, the girl accepting the proffered arm of Uncle Sun Up, and they walked slowly up the street which was Broadway, one of the main arteries of this Eastern District of Brooklyn.

"Sakes alive!" the Westerner ejaculated in wonder, as he looked around him, "how things have changed in this yere burg."

"I used for to live over on this side of the water 'bout twenty years ago, but I would hardly recognize it now."

"I am a stranger here, and I do not remember ever being in this part of Brooklyn before."

"Never hyar afore?"

"I think not."

"What in the name of wonder, then, were

you a-doing on the ferry-boat? Why was you a-coming to a place you didn't know anything about?"

"I was seeking an opportunity where I could bury myself and sorrows beneath the wave. In the bosom of the river I intended to find both forgetfulness and rest—rest eternal."

"Oh, no; the Angel Gabriel would have had you up when he commenced to toot his horn, and then, young lady, mebbe you would have a hard row to hoe when the Recording Angel comes to pass judgment upon you, and I reckon it won't be an easy question to answer when he axes you by what right you destroyed the life that the Creator gave."

The voice of Uncle Sun Up had grown solemn, and the girl felt the rebuke keenly.

"Oh, I know it was a very wicked thing to do, but I was so wretched and desperate that I really believe I was not quite in my right senses."

"Say, if I was to let you go now, would you go back to the drink?" the Westerner demanded, abruptly.

"The drink?" she queried, not understanding his meaning.

"Yes, the drink—the river, you know. That is what we Westerners call it sometimes, but why I don't know, 'cos thar ain't no reason for it, 'cept that we never drink it if we kin help ourselves."

And again Uncle Sun Up indulged in one of his prodigious grins.

"You mean would I again attempt to commit suicide?"

"Yes, sir-ee; now you've hit it; that's my meaning as plain as a pike-staff."

"No, sir, I would not; although I do not know what is to become of me, for I am without friends and almost penniless."

"Then, too, as I told you, I have been so brought up that I am unable to do anything in particular by means of which I can support myself."

"Mighty big fool way of bringing up a gal, I reckon," Uncle Sun Up grumbled.

"I don't keer if the parents have a million, it's their duty to their young 'un for to fotch 'em up so they kin git a living if the tide of misfortune ever strikes in and they have to look out for themselves."

"Say! I've got use for jest sich a gal as you air, I reckon. Kin you write a good hand—no flimsy, flourishing, ornamental stuff, but a hand that kin be read without the aid of a cork-screw?"

"Yes, sir; I write very plainly, indeed—so I have been told."

"You'll fill the bill. I want a what-do-you-call-it to write my letters for me. Will you try the job?"

CHAPTER VII.

A NOVEL BAPTISM.

TEARS of gratitude stood in the eyes of the forlorn girl as she gratefully accepted the kindly offer.

"Of course I am utterly inexperienced," she said, "and you will have to instruct me in regard to what you want."

"Sart'in; but it will be jest as simple as simple kin be."

"I will tell you what to write, and you kin put it down and dress it up in fine style, 'cos I'm a kinder rough old galoot, and I ain't much used to handling a pen, and then, too, I reckon my grammar ain't what it ought to be, but you kin fix that all right."

"I will do my best, sir, to deserve your trust and repay your kindness."

"Oh, you'll do it; I ain't afeard of that!" Uncle Sun Up declared, warmly.

"You know you must take into consideration the fact that I am the worst kind of an old bach, and have been used to hustling for myself for many a long year now, so I ain't much used to female society."

"The only woman that thar is 'round my ranch is Old Black Bet, the cook, and she, I reckon, is about a hundred and ten, and with a jaw on her like a baboon."

"Nary a chick nor child have I in this world, nor any relative either," and the man's rough voice unconsciously grew solemn and deep.

"I'm like the red-skin when he got up and said: 'Thar's nary a drop of Logan's blood in the veins of any living creature!'"

"Them ain't exactly the words, young gal, but that's the idee."

"I'm like you, all alone in the world, and thar's only about one thing which leads me to hang on to life," and as he spoke there was a savage glint in his eyes which belied the everlasting smile always on his lips.

"I'm hyer in the East fer to make that riddle now, and when the job is done—and I reckon it won't take me long, if I kin ever get at it—though I don't see my way clear now—then I'm ready to let this old carcass go under the daisies whenever my time comes."

"I ain't got any reference fer to give you, little gal, fer I ain't been in this yere big wilderness of a city fer many a long year, and 'bout all the people who ever knew me have gone to their long bome, but if you was to go out to old Missouri, down on the Arkansaw line, in that

air region atween the Boston Mountains in Arkansas and the Ozark Range in Missouri, and ax fer Uncle Sammy Sun Up—that's my name—I reckon thar ain't a man, woman or child, white, black, red or mixed, who wouldn't speak a good word fer me."

"Oh, sir, to me you are like a guardian angel, for you have saved me from a crime, at the bare thoughts of which my mind now recoils with horror!" the girl exclaimed.

"That's the right way to look at it!" Uncle Sun Up replied. "Never say die! 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.' That's the ticket!"

"And now, little gal, let's see how we will arrange this peppergram."

"Don't mind my French, you know. I sling in a word once in awhile, jest to let folks see that I know a thing or two, if I am a backwoodsman from 'way down on the Arkansas line."

"But I say, come to think of it, I've been explaining who I am and wasting enuff chin-music to make the fortune of a stump-speaker, but you have been as close-mouthed as an alligator caressing a mule."

"If it is a fair question who may you be?"

Again the girl appeared to be greatly troubled, and after watching her for a moment and noticing her confusion, the Westerner blurted out:

"If I hurt yer, say so. Don't be afeard to yell if I touch you in a tender p'int, and I won't do so not no more."

"Oh, you have been so kind, so like a guardian angel, that I feel I ought not to have any secret from you, but it is not mine alone—"

"Shut pan then. Don't you say a word. That is all right. You never struck such an easy old galoot as I am to get along with since you were hatched."

"I don't want to know anything 'bout you if it is going to worry you a mite to tell me, and least of all if you have got to give somebody else away in the telling on it to me."

"That ain't the kind of hairpin I am, you know."

"And that reminds me when you come to talk of guardian angels I reckon I'm the queerest-looking customer for the guardian angel business that was ever run afoul of."

"Thar's no sich brand as that on my hide. If you was to set me up for Santa Claus, if I had a fur suit, with my hair and beard, I reckon I might fill the bill."

"But to come back to our mutton again, I've got to call you something, you know, some kind of a name—can't keep on a-calling you little gal all the time."

"I—I would prefer not to give my real name," the girl observed slowly and with great timidity.

"Not that I have ever done any thing to cause me to be ashamed of it," she hastened to add. "I hope you will believe that."

"Sart'in! you kin bet all yer wealth onto it."

"I don't keer two wags of a mule's tail for yer real name. All I want is some sort of a handle so I kin drop the little gal business and call you like a Christian."

"How will Maggie do?—Maggie is a nice name. I've got a blooded brown Morgan mare on my ranch named Maggie, and she kin beat the hoofs off any beast along the Arkansas River at any distance from a quarter-mile dash to four-mile heats."

"She's a rattler, I tell yer."

"Maggie is a pretty name, and I should dearly like to be called Maggie."

"You shall be. I'll christen you right now."

And drawing a small flask, which was half-full of brandy, from his breast pocket, he moistened the tip of his forefinger with the liquor and then touched the girl's forehead with it.

"Maggie!" he exclaimed.

"Thar you air, I s'pose that ain't quite on riggle—a little more of my French, you know—but it will answer."

"I'm kinder rusty at this sort of work anyway. It's so long since I was baptized that I don't remember anything about it," and here Uncle Sun Up indulged in one of his prodigious grins. "And it's rayther too late in the day to try any brandy baptism on me. Nothing short of a miracle would ever git the brandy up higher than my mouth."

And here the Westerner chuckled for a moment in huge enjoyment of his own joke.

"Maggie is first-rate for you for the beginning of yer handle, but we must have something else for the end."

"Lemme see! We'll come back to fu'st principles, by the Injun way of naming."

"I found you on the boat—Miss Maggie Boat?"

"No, I don't like that."

"It was a ferry-boat and on the river."

"That will fit!"

"Miss Maggie Rivers! How will that suit?"

The girl thought the appellation a charming one.

"All right; that is your name then, from now out, or as long as you stay with me."

"Now, another p'int we must look arter: You are a handsome young gal—as pretty as a picture, and though I am a rough old codger, yet

some folks might talk, seeing us together, for thar's a deal of evil in this world."

"Now I am everybody's uncle, you know—at home, down on the Arkansas line, I'm uncle to everybody, from the judge on the bench down to the little nig that shines my boots:—'twouldn't be much wrong, would it, if Miss Maggie Rivers was to be the niece of Uncle Sammy Sun Up?"

"No, I think not."

"That settles it; and that is the way it will be."

"You hain't got no family, if I understand the matter rightly?"

"None."

"Neither have I, so thar won't be any relatives to make morths at the story if they should happen to catch onto it."

"I'm yer old uncle, come back from the West whar I have been a-growing up with the country and I'm a-going to take you out thar. You're the darter of my sister—sister Maggie," he added, after a moment's thought.

"Most nat'ral thing in the world, you know, for you to be named arter your maw."

The girl nodded.

"That looks all straight and aboveboard, and I reckon no one will doubt it."

"Oh, no, sir; I don't see why any one should. It is a harmless deception and wrongs no one."

"That's one of my particular p'int, you know; I never put my spoon in anybody else's soup, but when I have a call to be interested in the b'ling, you kin bet high that I am bound to be thar or tharabouts!"

At this point Uncle Sun Up consulted his watch.

"Hello! right in the shank of the evening!" he exclaimed.

"Jest two o'clock. Wa-al, we have got to put in three or four hours some way, for it won't do to go and seek accommodations anywhere at such an hour. But, lordy! I'm talking stupid! We kin put up at any of the first-class hotels for the night, and I'll hunt a quiet boarding-house up in Harlem for reg'lar quarters. That will suit, hey?"

The girl thought it would.

"I calculated to hang out at the Metropolitan, but that is too public a place, and you'll be a heap more comfortable in some quiet, homelike boarding-house."

The girl—Maggie, as we shall hereafter call her—was perfectly willing to do as her companion said; so they crossed the river to New York and proceeded to the Metropolitan Hotel, where rooms were engaged.

"Wa-al, if I didn't find the gal I came East after, I found another one," the Westerner murmured, as in a bold hand he inscribed on the hotel register the names:

"SAMUEL SUN UP, MUD FLAT, MO."

"MISS M. RIVERS, BROOKLYN, N. Y."

CHAPTER VIII.

STRIKING A LEAD.

WITHIN five minutes after he retired to rest the Missourian was sleeping like a bear in winter.

It was a strange thing, as he had remarked to himself just before he went to bed, the encounter with the girl had served to still the excitement under which Uncle Sun Up was laboring when he encountered her and which had served to raise the blood in his veins to fever heat.

"Durn me if I ain't glad I met that girl," he murmured, "for I do believe that if I hadn't a run inter something else to kinder give me a chance to let off steam I believe I would have had an attack of brain-fever."

"Yet I ain't quite satisfied that this air world is running the way it ought to, though I reckon the little gal is, for it must look to her jest as if it was the hand of Providence that led me on board of that air boat whar I had no business at all."

"But in my business thar's no clew nor do I see whar I am going to git one."

"That ain't right!"

"And hyer is Benoni Wellraven and Ben Wellington jest a-rolling in money when they both ought to be in the State Prison. That's durned eternally wrong, and if the Lord don't interfere to straighten the matter out somehow, then in my opinion he ain't a-running things as they ought to be run. Mebbe I ain't fit to judge, but that is my human way of looking at it."

And then the Missourian went to bed.

He was up at seven in the morning despite the lateness of the hour at which he went to bed, proceeded to the dining-hall where he got his breakfast, and then called upon his protégée.

She was up and ready to receive him.

"Better have your breakfast served in your room," he remarked, rightly conjecturing that she would not like to go down to the public table.

"I'll scoot arter a boarding-house and as soon as I git one will come back after you."

Uncle Sun Up had looked over the *Morning Journal* while at breakfast and had noted in his memorandum-book some addresses attached to advertisements of boarding-houses in the uptown district.

His quest was a successful one and he pro-

cured accommodations with a very pleasant middle-aged widow lady on one of the side streets between Second avenue and the Harlem River.

After making all the necessary arrangements the Westerner went through to Third avenue for the purpose of taking a car down-town, and as he turned into the avenue his attention was attracted by an old and wretched-looking man seated on a doorstep.

The fellow was very poorly dressed and his clothes were covered with dust as though he had come in from a long walk in the country.

"That's a genuine Eastern tramp, and no mistake, I reckon," the Missourian soliloquized, as he surveyed the pitiful-looking object.

"Looks as if he was jest dying for a drink, too," Uncle Sun Up continued.

"Darn me if I don't go a quarter on that cuss. That will give him two good horns of whisky, and on the strength of such liberal patronage he kin fill up at the free lunch counter until he is 'bout ready to bust."

"Hello, pard! how goes it?" quoth Uncle Sun Up as he strode up to the steps where the man sat, and leaning on the stone railing looked down at him.

It was an evil face that was upturned at the Westerner's hearty greeting, and it was plain that an insolent reply was on the tip of the fellow's tongue, but there was something in the jolly red face of Uncle Sun Up that checked the feeling of resentment which had sprung up in the breast of the old fellow at being addressed by a stranger, and suggested an idea to him.

"Gimme a nickel," he exclaimed in a whining voice, and extended a hand as he spoke, which trembled as though the owner was afflicted with the palsy.

"A nickel—what for?"

"I'm hungry—ain't had anything to eat since yesterday morning: wish I may die if I have. Gimme a nickel or I'll starve to death."

"Too thin," replied Uncle Sun Up; "you don't want to buy any food—a knowing old chap like you must know a trick worth two of that. If you are hungry, all you have to do is to make a raid on one of those houses, and with that pitiful face of yours the chances are a thousand to one that you'll strike every other time."

"You think you are cussed smart, don't you?" snarled the tramp, angrily.

"Oh, yes, I'm old Smart's uncle. You want a nickel to get a drink; beer will suit you better than bread."

"Say! if you give me a nickel whose nickel will it be?" asked the old man abruptly.

"Yours, after you git it of course."

"What business then is it of yours how I spend my money?" exclaimed the tramp with quite a dignified air.

Uncle Sun Up laughed; the conceit amused him.

"Wa-al, I reckon that is pretty solid, sound sense and no mistake."

"Any gen'leman ought to have the right to spend his money in the way that suits him best."

"Well, I am a gen'leman," cried the old man, angrily, thinking that the other intended to make game of him.

"I ain't got on the togs now and I am clean down to my uppers, but I'm a gen'leman all the same. I'm jest in from the country and I'm all played out and done up, else I wouldn't look so bad."

"Been taking a walk, hey?"

"Well, I should smile!" exclaimed the tramp with an attempt to be facetious.

"How far do you s'pose I've walked in two days, and I'm getting old now and my joints are all stiff with the rheumatics."

"Couldn't say."

"Forty miles. How high is that for an old man of sixty whose health ain't good either?"

"Pretty tough I should say."

"Yes, sir, and I covered nearly every foot of the way, for they are a mean stingy lot of people all out through Westchester and I got mighty few lifts. The biggest one was only a mile out of Orienta."

The name came so suddenly upon Uncle Sun Up, that for a moment he showed by the expression in his face that it was not unfamiliar to him.

The keen eyes of the old man at once noted this.

"Are you acquainted around Orienta?" he asked.

"Wa-al, no; not much."

"It's a cussed mean place," the tramp snarled. "The dogs were set onto me at almost every place I tried to get at. I wouldn't have gone down there if I hadn't thought I would make a big raise."

"All New Yorkers down there, you know, big-bugs with lots of cash, and more style and airs than you kin find right hyer in Fifth avenue."

"Is that so?"

"You kin bet yer life on it, and the biggest bug of them all was the man I went to see."

A wild, vague hope shot suddenly into the mind of the Missourian.

Back to his memory came the words of the

broken-down clerk, Tom La Porte, regarding Benoni Wellraven.

A millionaire a dozen times over and owning a magnificent place at Orienta.

Surely there could not be any man in the place able to hold his head higher than he.

Now, by this chance meeting with the old tramp—a meeting which was due to his generous impulse to help a man who was evidently suffering—was he about to receive some intelligence in regard to the man in whom, above all men in this world, he was most interested?

"I know some of the Orienta people," Uncle Sun Up remarked carelessly, as though he was merely talking for the sake of passing away the time, and not from any real interest in the matter.

"Thar's Benoni Wellraven—"

"The devil!" exclaimed the tramp, abruptly.

"What's the matter?"

"Do you know him?"

"I reckon I do."

"He's the man I went to see."

"Oh, get out! you are trying to stuff me now!"

This was an ingenious attempt on the part of the Missourian to lead the tramp on to further disclosures.

"No, I ain't; I guess I know what I am talking about," the other retorted.

"Why, Wellraven is a millionaire—a galoot with more money than he knows what to do with, and I reckon you ain't the style of visitor who is apt to call on a man of that kidney."

"Mebbe I might tell you that you ain't fixed up so grand yourself!" the tramp retorted, indignantly.

"You don't look as if you was a pal of a millionaire—more like a horse-jockey from Bull's Head."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Uncle Sun Up, who was seemingly always ready to laugh on the slightest provocation.

"I look like a horse-jockey from Bull's Head, do I? Well, neighbor, you ain't so far out in your calculation, 'cos I am, in the stock line, but my bull's head is on the Missouri plains by the Arkansasaw."

"I'm from the West, I am, but I was in New York years ago, and that was the time when I knew Benoni Wellraven."

"I was in the same business-house with him down in Broad street when I was a youngster—the old firm of Wellraven and Wellraven."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the old tramp, in wonder.

"Well, of all the strange things—to think that you and I should have happened to meet in this promiscuous way."

"I know all about that house and everybody in it, although I hadn't anything to do with it. I had a relative in that place, Chris Chadbourne. My name is Basil—John Basil."

The attention of the old man happened to be attracted to a team passing the street at that moment, and so he did not notice the strange expression which gathered in the earnest eyes of the Westerner, and when he again glanced at him the look had vanished.

"I don't remember you," Uncle Sun Up remarked, "but then my memory is poor."

"I was with that firm—one of the porters, Gil Featherstone."

"Why, I remember you jest as well as kin be!" cried the old tramp, rising to his feet. "But I thought you were dead long ago!"

"Oh, no; I'm worth a dozen dead men. But, I say, let's come into this beer shebang and have a bowl for the sake of old times."

Uncle Sun Up believed he had "struck a lead."

CHAPTER IX.

A VILLAINOUS SCHEME.

THE old tramp accepted the invitation with alacrity.

The saloon was a large one, and in the rear were the round card-tables usually to be found in such places.

The place was barren of customers, and the Missourian perceived the moment he entered that he would be able to talk with his companion without fear of being overheard.

The bartender looked askance at the old tramp as he hobbled into the saloon after Uncle Sun Up; but when the Missourian rung a ten-dollar gold-piece upon the counter and called for "two beers," the countenance of the attendant changed, and he hastened to execute the order.

"Let's sit at one of the tables," the Westerner suggested to his companion.

"And, by the way, bar-keep, make me a cheese sandwich. Have a sandwich, old man?" he asked of his companion.

"Certainly," replied the other; "I allers take everything I can get."

"But you never take anything out of your reach, nor a red-hot stove," suggested Uncle Sun Up, jocosely, as they seated themselves at the table.

The beer and the sandwiches were brought. The liquid was dispatched in a twinkling, and then a fresh supply ordered.

"Wa-al, now, I wish I may be shot if this

hyer thing ain't odd—this unexpected meeting 'tween us two," the Missourian remarked.

"But I say, the world don't seem to have used you well."

"No, no," responded the other, with a half-groan, "I've had a most awful run of luck for fifteen or eighteen years now."

"Wa-al, that's bad; but I say Wellraven ought to have helped you a leetle; he's got plenty of money, and you two used to be pretty well acquainted, didn't you—have another beer—or, perhaps you prefer a little whisky or brandy?"

"Brandy would do me good, for I need strength," the tramp replied, his eyes glistening; "but I don't want to ride a free hoss to death, and then they only give you a thimbleful for a drink."

"I'll show you how we do it in Missouri when we meet an old pard!" Uncle Sun Up observed, in his cheery way.

"Hyer, bar-keep, bring us a bottle of the best brandy that you've got in the house, and some more sandwiches."

"I'm so hungry that I think I could eat a horse behind the saddle."

And the eyes of the wretched tramp sparkled and he smacked his thin, bloodless lips in anticipation of the feast.

This was a most unexpected windfall.

The attendant fairly flew to execute the order. Customers of the Uncle Sun Up description were not plentiful.

A glass of the potent liquor made the old tramp feel like another man, and it gave him boldness to strike the giver of the feast for a small loan.

"Certainly!" responded Uncle Sun Up, pushing toward the tramp the change which the waiter had just brought of another ten-dollar gold-piece.

Then the tramp had another glass of brandy after pocketing the money, and this produced the result which the Missourian expected.

"Say, old man, you've got money and pluck."

"You bet!"

"I think I can put you up to a good thing if you care to go in with me."

"All right. I'll go you. I'm open for any spec' that's got money into it."

"You were saying that you thought Wellraven ought to help me?"

"Yes, so I think."

"He's the meanest bound that walks this earth to-day," the old tramp fairly hissed.

"Pshaw! you don't say so?"

"It is the truth. I was his tool years ago. I did his dirty work for him, he paid me well, of course, but now that I am down on my luck—almost starving for want of money, the miserable, black-hearted villain would let me die in the street rather than open his pocket-book to give me a cent."

"Wa-al, now, I say, durn his contemptible carcass! Take a leetle more brandy."

"Don't care if I do," and the tramp held his glass for the other to fill.

The potent fluid had performed its work well, and made the old tramp communicative exactly as Uncle Sun Up had supposed would be the case.

"I went out to see him to see if I could arrange for him to allow me a small sum per week. I only asked him for three dollars and he told me that I was crazy, and that if I ever showed my face on his place again he would have me horsewhipped off the grounds."

"I had sneaked in, you see, past the porter's lodge when there wasn't nobody looking."

"I see, I see."

"Now then, I've got a secret concerning this Wellraven which ought to be worth money, but I can't work it; I'm a broken man now and I ain't got the pluck. You might be able to get some money out of it, and then you could divide with me."

"Cert, pard; put it thar," and the Missourian extended his brawny hand.

The two shook hands, and then the old tramp continued, cautiously, in a low tone:

"The thing happened about twenty years ago."

"Yas, that was just about the time that I quit New York and went out West."

"Did you go before the time when they had the trouble in the office—when some of the clerks were caught stealing by means of false entries in the books, and two of 'em, Tom La Porte and my cousin, Chris Chadbourne, were sent to Sing Sing?"

"No, I left right after that time. But, do you know, I always thought that Chris Chadbourne wasn't guilty, although he was convicted and the evidence ag'in' him was mighty strong."

"I didn't pay much attention to the affair," the old tramp replied, his manner totally indifferent as though he took no interest in the subject.

"Of course he swore that he was innocent, but then almost every man who is charged with any offense swears that. Ain't many of them got the gall to own right up and admit they are guilty," the tramp remarked with a knowing wink.

"He was convicted, and I guess there wasn't much doubt that the law nailed the right man; but, I say, I didn't take any interest in the af-

fair. Chris was allers a kind of milksop of a fellow; he never went out with the boys, nor went in for a good time, like the rest."

"Yes, yes, Chris was a quiet chap," and Uncle Sun Up shook his head as though the fact was greatly to the discredit of the aforesaid Christopher.

"But then you see he was married and had a wife and child."

"Exactly, and that is what I'm coming too."

"The wife and child, eh?" exclaimed the Missourian in his jolly way, but there was a strange expression in his eyes, and his mirth seemed forced and constrained.

"Take a little more brandy—the wife and child; well, that's good."

"Wait until you hear how nicely I played my cards," chuckled the old tramp, as he reached for the bottle.

Uncle Sun Up pushed it over to him, and if the old bum had not been so much under the influence of the liquor, he surely would have noticed that the hand of the Westerner trembled visibly.

But Basil had eyes only for the brandy, and his mind was busy with the past.

"Yes, the wife and child put a heap of money in my pocket, and they are good for more now, if the scheme is properly worked."

"You see, the way of it was this:

"Chris's wife's maiden name was Margaret Chetwood. She was a remarkably pretty English girl, and all the boys were crazy after her before she married Chadbourne."

"She might have had Benoni Wellraven, although he was the heir to big money and she hadn't anything; but she preferred the poor clerk to the rich man's son, poor fool!"

"Oh, yes, women will do such things."

"Chris got into trouble and was sent to Sing Sing; his wife had considerable money saved up and she went to work with her needle and got along very well until the news came that Chris, in endeavoring to escape from Sing Sing, had been shot and killed, and that broke her up completely."

"She was taken sick, and for six months lay between life and death."

"Poor girl!" and there were tears in the eyes of the big, rude Westerner—tears in his voice, too, as he uttered the simple sentence.

But the other never heeded them; the brandy had taken about all his shrewdness away, although he was such an old soaker that the effect of the liquor barely showed.

"Of course the sick woman would have suffered, for her money was soon swept away, if I had not come to her assistance."

"You?"

Deep was the astonishment expressed in the voice, and great was the stare of amazement which appeared on the bluff face of Uncle Sun Up.

"Oh, yes; I took a deal of interest in her, for Chris Chadbourne was my cousin, you know."

And here the old tramp winked significantly; then thrust his tongue into his teeth and leered in the face of the other.

"You are in too deep for me, pard; I am over my head and must swim out."

"There are wheels within wheels, do you see?" and Basil chuckled.

"Don't you remember that Benoni Wellraven was just crazy after this girl before she married Chris Chadbourne?"

Uncle Sun Up nodded.

"Well, he never got over his craziness, and hankered after the girl jest as much after she was Chris Chadbourne's wife as before she was married."

"Of course, as the girl loved her husband, Benoni knew that there wasn't any chance for him, but when Chris died then he thought his innings would come."

"He didn't dare to take any open steps, for his father wanted him to marry some gal with plenty of tin, and he knew the old man would cut up rusty if he found out that his son was fooling around the convict's widdler."

"I was the go-between that Benoni employed. He found the money, and I gave it to her."

Uncle Sun Up nodded as token that he understood.

"Then when she got well enough to be moved I took her home to my house. Benoni paid the bills and began to drop in on friendly visits, every now and then. At last he got to be a reg'lar caller, but it was two years, though, before he made any progress with the gal; but at last she seemed to be kinder making up to him."

"Nat'ral—nat'ral under the circumstances," the Missourian remarked, and there was a groan in his voice as he spoke, and a pained look in his eyes.

"She was all alone in the world, too weak to work, and with a child to support, and at a certain time my wife blabbed out the truth that it was Benoni's money what had been supporting her all along."

"I see, I see; it was all cut and dried of course, ah!" and Uncle Sun Up gave utterance to a profound yawn which seemed more like a groan than anything else.

"Sart'in! That was the game. Benoni's a

shrewd, black-hearted scoundrel; he was then, and he ain't changed for the better since.

"He calculated to win on gratitude and sense of obligation if he couldn't on love."

"And she was as helpless in the hands of this man as a dove in the claws of a hawk," the Missourian remarked, his voice deep and sonorous, so that it was like the tones of another man.

"That is about it. And then as the doctor said she needed a change of air Benoni took her and her child down South, all on the sly, you know, for he was careful not to let his dad know what tricks he was playing, for the old man would have been in his wool mighty quick."

"Yes, yes, a cunning rascal, that's the man I know to the life."

"Benoni talked his father into establishing a branch house in Savannah and persuaded the dad to put him in charge of it. That was so he could be near the gal."

"Time passed on; both of the old partners died and Benoni came in for all the money. Then he came back to New York, but, as he didn't come near me, I made bold to call on him, on pretense, you know, to ask how Mrs. Chris Chadbourne was, but in reality to see if I couldn't strike him for a few ducats, but he wouldn't have it. Oh, no, he's no sich man."

"He appeared to be very much astonished at my inquiry, and asked me if I didn't know that both Chris's widow and child had died over two years ago."

"I knew he was lying, but I didn't let on, of course, and when I suggested that I thought I ought to have a leetle more money, he said he had paid out for charity all he intended to give, and that he couldn't do anything for me."

"He hadn't any use for you and so cast you aside like a sucked orange."

"That is it exactly. I left, of course, and, would you believe it, not three days afterward I saw Chris's widow and child in a carriage going up-town."

"Mebbe you made a mistake about the matter?" Uncle Sun Up suggested.

"Nary a mistake!" the tramp returned, positively. "I saw the game, then, and guessed why the report of the death was circulated."

"Benoni had a morbid fear that some friend of Chris Chadbourne would find out what he had been up to and call him to an account."

"How could that be? Poor Chris didn't have no friends, I reckon."

"Well, I don't know about that," the tramp replied, mysteriously.

"That was a mighty queer thing happened 'bout a year after Chris's death. A letter came to New York from some place away out West, I don't exactly remember where now, but it was away off, and it was addressed to Mrs. Christopher Chadbourne, New York, and that was all; no street or number, and written in a great sprawling hand."

"Well, one of them smart post-office chaps managed to smell out that Mrs. Christopher Chadbourne was stopping with me and so the letter came into my possession."

"I see, I see!" said the Missourian, and there was the strangest kind of a look in his big eyes.

"I didn't give it to her, you know, but to Benoni, and he made no bones of opening it. It was from a chap out West who said that Chris Chadbourne had once done him a big service, and as he had heard that Chris was dead, and his widow needed money, he would be glad to do what he could in the matter."

Benoni was greatly troubled by this letter, and got me to write that both Mrs. Chris and her child were sick and in the hands of the doctor, who feared that neither one would ever recover; and in this letter I told him, furthermore, that I would advise him if any change took place, either for better or worse."

"Of course he cooked that up?"

"Every bit of it; then, in about a week, I wrote again, saying a very few days would end the life of both mother and child, and two weeks later I sent on the newspaper notice of the funeral of the two."

"Bogus of course."

"Certainly. Benoni got it up, and that ended the thing."

"But, Wellraven was haunted by the thought that this stranger might some day take it into his head to come to New York and look into the matter, and he was afraid I would give the snap away; so when he was down South he cooked the second report of death, so as to throw me off the track, too."

"I see, I see; mighty deep schemer this self-same Benoni Wellraven."

"Oh, you can bet high on that."

"Do you s'pose—do you s'pose—do you s'pose he married Chris's widow?" the Missourian asked, his tones strangely hollow; but the tramp was too much under the influence of the brandy, of which he was partaking liberally all the time, to notice anything of the kind.

"No, of course he didn't, or if he did he fooled her by some kind of mock marriage. She was an innocent, unsuspecting thing, you know and could be easily cheated by such a master-hand at all kinds of roguery as Benoni Wellraven."

"Are you quite sure he didn't?" the other persisted.

"Well, about as sure as a man can be of a thing which he didn't see with his own eyes."

"See, now," and the tramp stuck up one of his skinny hands and proceeded to check the points off on the fingers:

"I saw Mrs. Chris, here in New York looking well and well-dressed, and not three days after that Benoni Wellraven was married out at his country place at Orienta to some Jew gal from the West—Cincinnati, I think, who they say was worth a cool million."

"That would seem to be proof conclusive that he wasn't married to Chris's widow."

"Yes, that is about the way I figured it out, yet down in Savannah they were living together as man and wife, but under an assumed name, so that the old man wouldn't get after Benoni, you know."

"Yes, yes, the game is as clear as clear can be," Uncle Sun Up said, a world of sadness in his voice, but the old tramp was now entirely too much under the influence of liquor to notice what would have immediately attracted his attention and set him to wondering if he had possession of his senses.

"While he was dependent upon his father he fooled the woman who trusted him with some sort of a mock marriage, but when he came into the vast Wellraven property he cast her aside as he would a worthless glove, and sought for a woman who had money to add to his own."

"Has he any children?" and there was the glare of a demon in the eyes of the Westerner as he put the simple question.

"No; nary child!"

"And his wife—what kind of a woman is she?"

"I dunno; she's dead, anyway."

"Then the Lord hasn't favored him as much as he might," Uncle Sun Up observed, between his firm-set teeth.

"No, I reckon he hasn't, for with all his money, he has always acted like a man who carried a mighty heavy weight on his mind."

"Now, the scheme I was going to propose to you was, s'pose you make out that you are the feller out West who wrote the letter," and the old tramp grew confidential. "Don't you see how beautiful it can be worked?" and the speaker smiled hideously.

"You put on a big bluff; you've come East to look into the matter; you've hunted me up and found out that the dead business was a fraud and that the hull thing is a swindle; you're mad of course, and you are going to make somebody responsible; Mrs. Chris and her child are living, and you are going to find them or break things."

"I see, I see; you've got a great head!" and if the tramp had not had his wits fuddled with the brandy he would have been puzzled to decide whether this was intended for a compliment or for chaffing.

But as it was he hadn't a suspicion that it was not intended for genuine praise.

"I know a thing or two, you bet!" Basil declared.

"And mind you, I feel sure that both the wife and child are alive. This rascal is keeping up a separate establishment somewhere; and when he finds that you are hot on the track he will come down liberally to switch you off, and you will divvy with me, eh?"

"Oh, yes, you shall have half of all the money I get out of Benoni Wellraven."

Then Uncle Sun Up looked at his watch and said he would be going, but the tramp remarked he would remain until he finished the brandy.

So the Missourian, after taking Basil's address so he could get at him if he had any news, departed.

The tramp finished the brandy, and then sauntered into the street with the air of a lord, but the moment he got out into the sunlight the brandy began to take effect, a vigilant policeman came along, and in half an hour Basil was slumbering soundly in a station-house cell.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT THE TELEGRAPH SAID.

"WA-AL, I reckon I was wrong in my thought last night," Uncle Sun Up muttered as he ascended the steps which led to the elevated road.

"I guess that Providence is a-working the rifle about right, after all; I reckon everything will come out all O. K. in the long run."

"You can't 'most always generally tell 'bout these hyer things, until you git to the innards of the consarn."

"The millionaire, ten times over, ain't had some things so nice and easy, as it 'pears."

"Oh, the 'tarnel skunk! Don't I fairly ache to git at him! The time will come, and soon, too, or I may miss my reckon, when I will fetch him up with a round turn; then I'll put a lariat on him that will be apt to cut him to the heart."

"Can it be possible that Margaret and her child are alive, after all these years—all these years when they have been mourned as dead?"

"Talk 'bout the stories that them durned

literary fellers git up; why this hyer yarn beats them all hollow."

The arrival of the train on the elevated road put a stop to the musings of the Missourian.

He boarded it and soon was at the Metropolitan.

He engaged a hack, and suggested to the girl that it would look "kinder queer," as he expressed it, for her to go to the boarding-house without any baggage.

"I reckon we kin git a trunk, and you kin stop on the way up at some one of these big shops where they sell 'most anything and you kin buy some trash to put into it."

Rough as he seemed, Uncle Sun Up certainly understood exactly what was proper to do.

"You must remember, Maggie, that yer old uncle is pretty well fixed as fur as the filthy lucre is consarned, as the poet says, and a hundred dollars, more or less, ain't of no account, so rig yerself up like a lady."

"I want you to understand that, in this hyer partnership atween us, you air expected to come the ornamental part, while I do the solid ole man of the family; so now git yerself up in style and durn the expense. If you want any money while I am in town jest howl and you'll get it every time, you bet."

So out the two went, in the hack, and Maggie purchased an outfit, selecting the various articles with a taste and discretion which plainly revealed to the shrewd-eyed Westerner that his ward had been carefully reared and well-instructed in the duties of an efficient womanhood.

The shopping done, the articles were conveyed to the hotel where the trunk was packed, and then the pair started for the boarding-house.

The girl produced a favorable impression upon the landlady, immediately; and Uncle Sun Up, satisfied that his protégée was comfortably bestowed, returned in the hack to the hotel.

"Now, I'll settle down hyer, take a squint at the newspaper and wait for Tom La Porte to put in an appearance;—not that I reckon I will git much more out of him, for I pumped him dry last night."

"Providence didn't wait long afore she dealt out justice to the smaller scoundrels, the fellows who did the dirty work for the chief scoundrels," he continued, full of meditation, as he took a seat near the telegraph office.

"These two miserable wretches who did the dirty work the head scoundrels planned, have been brought down jest about as low as men kin be and live to show it."

"Thar's whar the old saying comes in, 'Cheating prospers the wrong way'; but all the same that wily devil of a Ben Wellington seems to have prospered; and it's a 'tarnal mystery how he's done the trick, too, for the galoot never had no natural ability outside of a certain amount of low cunning."

"Thar's some mystery 'bout the thing, and I shall make it my business to look into the matter, an' I shall do my level best to bring him to understand thar is some such thing in this world as justice and that every scoundrel is bound to be punished, in the long run."

"Providence seems to be a little slow in this case, so I reckon I'll have to do a leetle in the Providence line myself."

"Mebbe Justice has so much business to attend to that she has kinder overlooked this chap; so I will attend to his case, myself."

At this point the telegraph operator, who had been absent, entered his office and sitting at his desk, prepared for business.

When the "keys" began ticking, the Westerner laid his paper upon his lap and began to listen.

Any one not acquainted with the peculiarity of the case would certainly have taken Uncle Sun Up for some gaping countryman to whom the telegraph in operation was a novelty.

But that was not the truth: far otherwise.

The ticking was like music to his ears, for the Missourian was an old operator, and in his young days had been reputed to be one of the best telegraphers west of the Mississippi.

He was an expert—a sound-reader—and the language of the keys was as intelligible to him as though it was common conversation.

Shortly after the telegrapher took his seat the central office "called" him, to which he gave the O. K. signal, and then the warning came:

"Two important messages; take them carefully."

Again the "O. K." was returned, and just about this time Uncle Sun Up began to prick up his ears, metaphorically speaking.

His curiosity was excited and he made up his mind that he, too, would "take" these important messages.

We transcribe them just as the operator wrote them down and as Uncle Sun Up read them:

"RYE, N. Y., May 10th, 1885.

"To the Superintendent of Police, New York City:—

"Benjamin Wellington, a retired New Yorker, living on Taylor's Point in the town of Rye—Rye Neck usually called—was found murdered in his library this morning. No signs of a struggle. The victim killed by a single knife-thrust in the back, in

the region of the spine, evidently delivered from the rear as the man was bending over. No plunder taken as far as can be seen, although there was plenty in the apartment, as the murdered man had been examining a small private safe which stood in one corner of the apartment and which was found open, with the key in the lock when the murder was discovered this morning.

"Send some experienced detectives to examine into the matter at once."

(Signed)
"MERRETT PURDY,
"AMBROISE SNIFFIN,
"ENOCH TAYLOR,
"SELECTMEN, Town of Rye."

Uncle Sun Up drew a long breath and hid his face behind his newspaper when the message was finished, for fear the telegrapher would notice the interest he was taking in the matter and suspect that he could understand what the electric messenger was saying.

And while the telegrapher was preparing the message for transmission to its destination, the Missourian gave vent to the wonder which filled his mind.

"Wa-al, if this don't beat anything I ever heard of all holler!" he murmured, under his breath. "I was just a-finding fault with Providence, 'cos I reckoned that Justice had clean forgot to punish this miserable scoundrel, an' jest when I was flying in the face of Heaven and a-trying to make out that I knew a heap sight better how things ought to be done than the Lord did, the hand of a secret assassin had laid the culprit low."

"I give up, and I will never attempt to regulate anything of this kind hyerafter."

"What is that the poet gits off to fit sich cases as this?"

"The mills of the Gods grind slow, but they grind exceeding fine."

"That fits it to an iota!"

"You kin bet all the wealth in the world on that!"

"Ben Wellington is gone—struck right down by the hand of an avenger, mebbe, and just as he was calculating thar wasn't going to be any trouble 'or him—chuckling, perhaps, and reckoning that Providence had forgotten all about him and thar wasn't any danger he would ever be brought to book for the crimes committed long ago."

"Wa-al, as I have said afore, in some cases you can't 'most always generally tell how the old cat is going to jump."

By this time the operator had got through with the first message and signified to the central office that he was ready for the second.

This, too, was addressed to the superintendent of police, and when the message began to come over the wire Uncle Sun Up listened fully as eagerly to this dispatch as to the other.

"MAMARONECK, N. Y., May 10th, 1885."

"To the Superintendent of Police, New York City:"

"Disappeared from her home, last night, my niece and ward, Adrienne De Courcy. Age, twenty years. Medium size, blonde. Long, golden hair, but dark-brown eyes. Very clear red and white complexion. Ladylike in her bearing and elegantly dressed. Wore when she disappeared brown silk dress trimmed with black lace. Seal sack trimmed with otter. Black hat trimmed with ostrich feathers. Considerable jewelry. Gold watch and chain, two diamond and one pearl ring. Diamond pin and earrings to match. One thousand dollars will be paid for any information which will lead to the recovery of the girl if she is living, or for her body if dead. Foul play is feared, as there is no known reason for her leaving her home. Spare no expense to work up this case. You are authorized to draw on me for funds if money is required. Employ the best detective talent that can be had. Wire me immediately if any discoveries are made."

"BENONI WELLRAVEN,
"Sound View Grange, Orienta Point, via
Mamaroneck, N. Y."

If the Missourian was astonished at the first message, he was still more so at this.

"Wa-al, wa-al, if this don't beat all!" he muttered to himself, still concealing his face behind the newspaper.

"Who is this gal, and why did she cut her lucky in this hyer unaccountable way?"

"Is thar any connection between the death of Benjamin Wellington and the disappearance of this gal?"

And the Westerner brooded over this question for a moment.

"That is an awful wild thought, of course, and if it hadn't been for the two telegrams coming right in together, I reckon it would never have come into my head; but I'll bet the biggest hat in this yere city that the chief of police axes himself the same question when he comes to read these dispatches."

"Thar may be something in the idee, and then ag'in thar may not be; you can't 'most always generally tell."

"Pshaw! I ain't got any time to waste in speculating 'bout the thing!" and he rose to his feet.

"They want detectives on these two cases and hyer's your uncle ready to command!"

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE TRAIL.

OUT from the hotel went Uncle Sammy Sun Up, hailed one of the carriages standing in front of the door, got into it and was driven off in a hurry to the Grand Central Depot.

"Hurry your animules up!" he remarked to the hackman as he entered the carriage and handed the man a five-dollar bill.

"Make the best time you kin to the Grand Central, 'cos I'm in a pesky haste to catch a train."

And the result of his five-dollar investment was that he was landed at the depot in remarkably quick time, and was able to catch a train on the New Haven Road, which a delay of two minutes would have caused him to miss, and then he could not have got another under another hour.

On the way to the depot the Missourian had meditated upon the situation.

"The fu'st thing fer me to do is to look into the death of Ben Wellington, and see what I kin make out of the matter," he mused.

"I shall get on the ground two hours ahead of the detectives sure, even if the superintendent starts them off right away, and the chances are big that he will not hurry himself in the matter."

"These country selectmen are in a deuce of a haste to telegraph to New York about the thing, but they don't say nary a word as to who is a-going to foot the bill, for this detective business costs money, and the Metropolitan sleuth-hounds ain't a-running all over the country at their own expense to nose out mysterious murder cases where thar ain't a cent of money in them, when they kin put in their time on jobs which will pan out well if they are lucky enough to strike a lead."

"So I think I am safe in reckoning that I will have six or eight hours the start of the regular detectives."

"But not on the missing gal business!"

"Oh, no!" and Uncle Sammy shook his head in a very decided manner.

"Benoni Wellraven is too old a New Yorker not to understand that if a man wants anything in this burg done promptly and right up to the handle he must be prepared to pay for it, and pay well, too, so he slaps a thousand dollars right at the detectives in the beginning."

"A thousand dollars for the gal, dead or alive, and if such an offer as that won't spur the average detective to do his level best I don't know what will!"

After the Missourian got into the train he fell to calling up recollections of the place to which he was bound.

Mamaroneck and its neighborhood had been as well known to Uncle Sun Up twenty years ago as the city itself.

The young men who were in the employ of the firm of Wellraven and Wellraven were in the habit of forming a little social club every summer and coming to Mamaroneck for the purpose of enjoying the water sports which were to be found in that neighborhood.

The Wellravens owned a farm on Orienta Point, and nearly all the clerks employed in the house spent a portion of their vacation in the neighborhood.

"Lemme see, now, if I can git the lay of the land," Uncle Sammy remarked, as he opened a memorandum-book which he took from his breast pocket, accompanied by a pencil, and proceeded on a blank page to draw a diagram of the locality to which he was bound.

"Hyers Orienta P'int and the Wellraven mansion," and he made a rude, irregular triangle on the right-hand side of the page.

"Right opposite to that is Taylor's P'int, on Rye Neck, and though it is five or six miles around by land from the one p'int to the other"—and he made another irregular triangle on the other side of the page, opposite to the first—"yet right across by water from the one p'int to the other it is less than a mile."

In fact, the two houses may be said to guard the entrance to Mamaroneck Harbor, and the Westerner studied the rude diagram for a few moments, evidently buried in reflection.

"Strange, sometimes when a thing gits into your mind how difficult it is to git it out ag'in."

"I keep coming back to the gal who, has sloped so unceremoniously, and I keep asking myself—is it possible now that she had anything to do with the murder of Ben Wellington?"

"The blow was dealt in the night. How easy for any one to cross in a boat from Orienta P'int to Wellington's house, enter the grounds, and git into the house without attracting any attention!"

"The escape could be effected in the same way, and, unless some one war on the watch by the water side, and spied the boat, either coming or going, thar wouldn't be the least trace that any one had been in the grounds."

"But, what reason had the gal to do the trick—what reason had any one to kill Ben Wellington?"

And the self-appointed detective fell into a brown study from which he did not awaken until the train came to a halt at Mamaroneck.

Half a dozen passengers got off the train and were instantly besieged by a couple of hackmen, whose well-worn vehicles stood by the side of the platform.

Uncle Sun Up selected the younger man of the two—an open-faced, honest-looking country boy, and made a bargain with him for the use of his carriage by the hour.

"Thar's two or three places I want to see, and I don't know how long it will take me, nor how far, so if we make a contract by the hour, both of us will have a square deal," he explained.

The hackman, of course, was glad to serve a customer whose fare was likely to be good.

The carriage was one of the old-fashioned carriages, two-seated.

The driver sat on the front seat, while the passenger occupied the rear, so they could converse with perfect freedom.

"I want to go to Rye Neck first," Uncle Sun Up explained, as the driver took up the reins.

"What part of the Neck?"

"Down by the point where the mill is."

The driver chirruped to his steed, which was rather a lanky, ungainly beast, and away they went.

"The town ain't changed much since I was here twenty years ago," the passenger remarked, after they had got under way and came to where the ruins of a factory stood, right in the heart of the village by the river, an ugly eyesore.

"No, not much; everything is about the same, hain't changed much in my time."

And then he shot a curious look at the stranger, whose general appearance was so different from the usual run of men as they are encountered in the East.

"I didn't calculate that you were acquainted in these parts," the driver continued.

"Wa-al, I'm from the West, as, mebbe, you have guessed from my rig, but I'm an old New Yorker, and years ago I used to come down hyer in the summer-time and fish all along-shore. I've caught many a mess of good pan-fish off Bush Rock and Black Tom with old man Palmer, and then we used to try off Flat Rock, outside, you know, for big black fish at high tide."

"Well, the fishing ain't what it used to be," the driver replied, with a shake of the head.

"Bush Rock, or Barrel Rock, as 'most every body calls it, has been blown up to clear the entrance to the harbor, but that is about the only change."

"Who was you a-going to see down to the p'int?"

By this time the vehicle had passed through the village center, which is almost as ugly a one as can be found, had climbed the hill by the church on the old Boston post-road, and turning abruptly at a right angle, followed a side street which led down to Long Island Sound, whose beautiful blue waters could be distinctly seen in the distance.

"I am on my way to see an old chum who used to be in the same store with me in New York, and many is the good time we have had in this yere harbor."

"But that was many years ago. I went West and got inter the cattle business, while he staid in the city, and I've heered has made a pile of money."

A sudden suspicion came into the driver's mind, and he turned a half-face toward his passenger.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I don't want to seem to pry into your business or to ax any impudent questions," he said, "but I hope it ain't Mister Wellington that you are a-coming to see?"

"Wa-al, now, sonny, you've hit it right, the very first lick, for that air is the identical man!"

"Benjamin Wellington?"

"That's him, and no mistake; Ben Wellington."

"Oh, Lordy!" exclaimed the driver with a sort of groan.

"Hello! what's the matter with you? Got a pain?"

"No, it ain't that, but I'm sorry for you, sir."

"What for?"

"You can't see Mister Wellington."

"Why not? Ain't he at home?"

"Oh, yes, he's at home, but he's dead."

"Dead?" and Uncle Sammy leaned back in his seat, and appeared as much astonished as though the intelligence was the last thing he expected to hear.

"Yes, sir, he's dead—was murdered last night," exclaimed the driver with solemnity befitting such an announcement.

"You don't tell me!"

"Fact, I assure you."

"And who did it?"

"That is jest what nobody knows; it is the biggest mystery that ever happened in this town."

"Wa-al, I declare to goodness if this don't beat all," the Missourian exclaimed.

"Say! pull your horse up and let him walk so you kin tell me all about it afore I get to the house."

"Certainly," and the driver complied immediately, glad of a chance to converse on the subject over which the village gossips had been wild ever since the discovery of the body.

"You see, I know all about it—as much as any man in the village," the driver explained.

"You don't tell me!"

"Yes, my uncle is a constable, and he was the

first man to be notified in the village after the murder was discovered."

"Wa-al, wa-al, I want to know!"

"Yes, and he went right down to the house and has been there ever since. I drove him down, and he and I were the first to see the body after the folks in the house."

"Wa-al, I'm glad I struck you, for you kin tell me all about it."

Eagerly the other delivered the tale.

CHAPTER XII.

GETTING AT THE TRUTH.

WE will not tire the reader by detailing the prolonged and circumstantial account which the young man poured into the ear of his attentive listener, but will give the salient points of the narrative:

Benjamin Wellington was somewhat of a mystery to people among whom he lived.

He was not like Wellraven or the rest of the gentlemen who owned fine places in the neighborhood; he had not made a fortune in trade or inherited money, and how he became possessed of wealth enough to keep up his elegant place in the style in which he did was a puzzle.

The current explanation was that he had made his money in the stock-market, by some lucky speculations, and that he still indulged in a flyer now and then.

But three or four prominent Wall street men, who had residences in the near neighborhood, declared decidedly that, as far as they knew, Wellington did not dabble in stock operations at all. If he did, he carried on his operations secretly through a broker, for he himself was not known on "the street."

But, that he either had money, or received it from some unknown source, was evident, for he lived at the rate of ten thousand dollars a year, and, of course, could not do this without the cash.

Wellington was not married. A housekeeper presided over his establishment—"a nation pretty woman," as the driver said; but the women in the neighborhood did not take kindly to her, although, to give her some sort of social standing, Wellington declared that she was his cousin, a widow lady who had been robbed of a large fortune in California by the rascality of the agent who had charge of her affairs.

But the neighborhood "wouldn't have it," to use the countryman's curt phrase, and she received "the cold shoulder" from all quarters.

Some of the young men in the vicinity, who were not particular where they went, so long as the dinners were good and the wine choice, accepted Wellington's lavish hospitality, and one of them, who had traveled extensively, still further increased the questioning about the lady by stating that he was certain he had seen her in England on the stage of some one of the minor theaters devoted to burlesques and a low order of dramas.

When this became whispered abroad all the ladies of the neighborhood exclaimed, "I told you so!" to one another, and then the gentleman was "cut" as badly as the housekeeper had been.

Not that this made any difference to Wellington.

He seemed supremely careless in regard to what the neighbors thought of him or of his household.

"I am glad they have sense enough to keep away from me," he was wont to remark, whenever the subject, which was not often, was brought up.

"What is there in common between a man of the world like myself, who believes that life was given us that we might enjoy ourselves, and a lot of pig-headed, stupid business men, whose only thoughts are of dollars and cents—who work like slaves to amass money which they haven't got the sense to enjoy?"

"Bah! I want nothing of them, nor of their dowdy women, whose only amusement consists in retailing scandal about their neighbors."

And Ben Wellington lived up to his principles, if ever a man did, for his house was the resort of the gayest people.

Professional people—actors, opera-singers, billiard kings, Bohemians of the higher grade—received a warm welcome at Castle Point, as the host termed his mansion.

He dealt out his hospitality with a lavish hand, and these guests of his always went away with the impression that their host was one of the most generous and wealthy of men.

They were deceived by the show, and believed there was plenty of substance back of it, but the long-headed business men who were this magnate's neighbors instinctively suspected that something was wrong, although not able to say what it was.

But the blow had fallen which had robbed the master of Castle Point of his life and the play was ended.

As near as the doctors—who were immediately summoned when the murder was discovered about midnight—could determine, the fatal blow had been given about ten o'clock that evening, since he had not been over two hours dead when they reached his side.

It was their opinion that the assassin had come behind Wellington as he stooped to reach

into the safe, and that the stroke had been almost immediately fatal.

In their judgment the man had hardly time to utter a groan before his soul was hurried into another world.

And now for the secret of his unceremonious taking off.

As the night was warm and pleasant, the porter, his wife and eldest daughter had sat outside by the lodge-gate from eight to eleven, when they had retired to rest, and all were positive that not a person had come near the place.

The grounds were surrounded by a high barbed wire fence so that it would be no easy job for any one to get over it.

The motive for the deed was a mystery, too, for as far as any of the household knew nothing was missing, although, of course, they were not aware of what might be contained in the safe.

But it did not seem as if the murder had been done for the purpose of plunder, for Wellington had on his person a heavy gold watch and chain, while still in his pocket was his wallet containing over a hundred dollars.

Then, too, he wore a couple of expensive diamonds, one on his finger and the other in his shirt-front.

None of these valuables had been disturbed, which would seem to prove that the murder had not been committed by any burglar entering the house for the purpose of robbery; and, besides, it was found that when the tragedy occurred all the inmates had retired to rest except the master; that no one had heard a sound, so that if the deed had been done by burglars they certainly would have taken the valuables which were at their mercy.

True, the safe was open, which might suggest that the marauders were after some particular plunder contained in that receptacle, and having secured it were satisfied to depart.

Two theories immediately suggested themselves to the acute mind of Uncle Sun Up:

First, Ben Wellington had been killed by an enemy whose purpose was vengeance, not robbery. Second, the man had been slain by one who desired to get possession of something in the safe. What that something was it was not possible to guess, so all speculations upon that point were useless.

"You'll find Captain Redford Palmer at the house, I reckon," the driver said, in conclusion. "He's a justice of the peace, and as the murder occurred in his district he has taken charge of the case."

"The capt'n is a cousin of mine and I'll introduce you, so you will get all the p'int's you want."

The Missourian thanked the young man for his offer and admitted that he was anxious to ascertain all he could about the matter.

Castle Point was situated on a point—as its name implied—extending into the blue waters of the Sound.

There were about ten acres in the place and the water surrounded it on three sides, and on the fourth a massive stone fence, surmounted on the top with barbed wire fastened to iron posts, presented an insurmountable obstacle against intrusion.

The driver called Uncle Sun Up's attention to this.

"You see, 'tain't any easy matter for anybody to git into the place when the gates are shut."

"But are they kept shut?"

"Allers, day or night; that was Mister Wellington's orders, and I tell yer, he was a man who was mighty hard to git along with if his folks didn't toe the mark."

"He allers raised an awful row if any of the people on the place didn't do exactly as he said. He wasn't the kind of man to speak twice about anything. It was obey orders or git out, instant."

Uncle Sun Up recognized the picture; years had not changed the man.

It was Wellington's custom to shirk all that he possibly could, but a more merciless driver, when he held the reins, never cracked a whip.

Castle Point was reached.

As the driver had expected, Justice-of-the-Peace Palmer was standing by the gate, and he immediately introduced the Westerner to him.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN IMPORTANT DISCLOSURE.

CAPTAIN REDFORD PALMER, justice of the peace, and one of the leading citizens of the town, was a middle-aged man of medium size, rather heavily-built, unassuming in appearance, but with a face indicating more than usual shrewdness.

The driver had explained that his passenger was an old friend of the master of Castle Point.

"A very unfortunate affair," the captain remarked. "It must have given you quite a shock."

"It did, I assure you; upon my word I think you might have almost knocked me down with a feather when this yere young man hit me with the news," Uncle Sun Up declared.

"A very sad and incomprehensible affair."

"Yes, I reckoned I would come on though and

take a squint at things. I s'pose I kin see the body?"

"Certainly, although we are careful whom we admit until the detectives come. We have telegraphed to New York to the superintendent of police to send us up some of his men to look into the thing."

"I see, I see; that is the proper thing, of course."

"We have been careful not to disturb anything more than was absolutely necessary. The body had to be placed in the undertaker's hands; but, apart from that, everything is in exactly the same condition as it was when the crime was discovered."

The two, walking toward the house, soon got out of ear-shot of the little group of loungers congregated by the gate.

"The New York detectives, I s'pose, will soon git at the rights of things," the Missourian remarked, with a side glance at his companion.

"Well, I don't know about that," the justice replied; "it depends on what kind of detectives the superintendent sends up."

"Is there any reward offered by the town for the discovery of the murder?"

"Oh, no; the town will not be apt to do it; the taxes are heavy enough already, and, as far as I can discover, this Mr. Wellington hasn't a relative in the world. I have been through all his papers and I haven't found any mention of any."

"I reckon he hasn't any. He was the only child of an only child. He was of English descent—was born in England in fact, and was brought to this country by his father when a lad; he was motherless then, too. But, what made me speak about a reward was, do you think these New York detectives, good, bad or indifferent, will trouble themselves about a case outside of their district, without there is a chance for them to make something out of it?"

Palmer nodded.

"You have hit it exactly, and that's just what I told the selectmen. I suggested that, if a reward of from five hundred to a thousand dollars was offered it would spur the detectives on, but the board wouldn't listen to it."

"Couldn't a purse be made up among the man's neighbors?" asked the Westerner. "About all there is in the immediate neighborhood are wealthy New Yorkers, I take it, who could well afford to chip in a fifty or a hundred apiece."

The justice shook his head.

"No; he was not on good terms with any of them. He was rather a quarrelsome fellow anyway—but, by the way, as the man was a friend of yours, I had better be careful how I speak."

"Oh, not at all! Go right on; spit out anything you like. He wasn't any friend of mine—only an acquaintance. We used to be in the same store together in New York, years ago—Wellraven and Wellraven."

"Is that possible?" the justice exclaimed.

"Well, now, I declare that is a piece of news. It is mighty funny, too. No one in this neighborhood knew that Wellington ever had anything to do with Wellraven."

"Did you know that Wellraven lives right across the water?" and the speaker pointed across the entrance to Mamaroneck Bay, to where Orienta projected into the Sound.

Upon the point, only a short distance from the water's edge, rose the lofty towers of Sound View Grange.

"I knew he lived somewhere in this neighborhood."

"That is his house, the big one on the point."

"I see."

"And Wellington used to be in his house, in New York, eh?"

"Well, I don't know about that. It was the old firm I was with—the father and uncle of this Wellraven. When they died the business came to him; but when I was in the store he was a clerk, this Benoni Wellraven, the same as Wellington and myself. That was twenty odd years ago."

"It is mighty strange," the justice remarked reflectively, "that there has been no intimacy between the two men. No one hereabouts suspected they had been well acquainted—which explains one thing that has puzzled me," but the justice relapsed into silence as if some weighty thought impressed him.

Uncle Sun Up broke the silence.

"Justice, I reckon from what I have seen of you that you are a man who knows enough to hold his tongue when it is necessary so to do, so I am going to let on to you. I am a detective, and my business up hyer is to look into this murder. I happened to be by when the telegram came, and as Wellington was an old acquaintance, and the case seemed to be an extraordinary one, I thought I would look into it without saying anything to anybody."

"The chief will probably send a man or a couple of them up, but that is all right; they will not interfere with me nor I with them."

The justice still was silent.

"It is my game, you know, to keep this matter quiet. I am only a rough old Western cuss, jest come back to the East for the purpose of hunting up old friends."

"I see, I see, and you are going at the thing in the right way in my opinion, and I will do all I can to help you along."

"The thing to which I alluded as having puzzled me is this:

"Wellington has always passed for a wealthy man in this neighborhood, and most certainly has kept up the style of a man who had plenty of money—not on credit, mind you, at the expense of a lot of confiding tradesmen, but on a cash basis."

"I have examined all his papers, and he doesn't seem to owe a hundred dollars in the world, but I can't find that the man is worth a cent beyond the money he had in his pocket at the time he was struck down."

"No bonds, no stocks, no bank account, no anything. The poorest day laborer in the town couldn't show less evidence of wealth."

"And, not only that, but this entire place is mortgaged for fifty thousand dollars—more than it would fetch in the market, I reckon, and Benoni Wellraven is the man who advanced the money!"

"And that link, connecting these two supposed strangers, puzzled you?"

"It did, indeed; and another puzzle: Where on earth did Wellington get the money which he has been spending so extravagantly for the last ten or twelve years?"

"Why, from this mortgage, of course, don't you see?"

"Yes—that might account for it!" the other remarked, a little doubtfully.

"Cert—bet your life on it, you know! Hyer's the solution of the riddle:

"Wellington made a big raise in stocks or something else, and, like a wise man, put the money in this place; then he borrowed fifty thousand dollars on it, and has been living on that money ever since."

"I ain't quite satisfied with that! In the last ten years he has spent nearer a hundred thousand than fifty."

"May have had fifty to start on, besides what he put into this estate," suggested the Missourian; "and then, in regard to there being no intimacy between Wellington and Wellraven—I understood from the driver that Wellington conducted himself in such a way that none of the neighbors cared to know him intimately, and I suppose Wellraven—who, I presume, holds his head pretty high—didn't care to have it known that he had once been a clerk in the same store with him; he lent him the money, but didn't care to associate with him."

"I guess you have hit it," Justice Palmer remarked; "I guess you have hit upon the truth. That explains the mortgage business, but throws no light on the murder."

"By the way, did you know that a ward of Wellraven's disappeared last night?" asked the old detective.

"Miss De Courcy? Yes; Wellraven had me out of bed at eleven last night, and asked me to do the best I could to ascertain what had become of her, and just after he left and I was getting ready to go out, the news of this murder arrived."

"Do you know if there was any acquaintanceship between Wellington and this Miss De Courcy?"

"No, I don't believe they knew each other. I never heard that they did."

"If they were acquainted—were on intimate terms, would not the flight of one at the time of the other strike you as being very suspicious?"

"It would, indeed; but in this case I think it is a coincidence; that is all."

By this time the two had reached the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LADY.

THE justice conducted Uncle Sun Up to the apartment where the murder had been committed. It was the library of the house, a good-sized room on the first floor, in the wing looking toward Orienta.

The windows were of the French pattern, reaching to the floor, and could be opened so that one could pass from the library directly to the lawn, which led to the water's edge.

The safe was one of the ornamental pattern, constructed in imitation of a small bureau, and the deception was so perfect that it required a close inspection to discover the truth.

Palmer explained exactly how the body lay when it was discovered.

"Sideways near the safe, eh?" mused Uncle Sun Up.

"Yes, as if he had fallen on his hands and knees and then rolled over."

"The blow was struck from behind."

"Yes and the doctors assert that it is their belief he was in a stooping position when the death-stroke was given, otherwise the blade could not have made the wound it did; and they further say whoever gave the blow knew exactly where to strike."

"Doesn't look much like a woman's work, does it?"

"No, sir, I think the theory about Miss De Courcy won't hold water."

Uncle Sun Up walked to the window and looked out.

"Whoever did the trick made their way hyer by boat. Not the least difficulty in coming or going in that way and in the darkness. Were all the folks in the house in bed when the thing happened?" the Missourian asked.

"All, except the butler. It was his custom to wait in the dining room at night until his master gave the signal for him to close the house up; but on this night, as he sat reading in an arm-chair, he fell asleep, and did not waken until after midnight; then he hurried to the library to see if Mr. Wellington was still there, and made the discovery that his master had been murdered, and, as soon as he recovered from his consternation, he gave the alarm."

"Does the butler have charge of the mansion?"

"Oh, no, there is a lady, Mrs. Delaro."

"Delaro?" and Uncle Sun Up looked his surprise. "It 'pears to me as if I had heered that name afore. I met a lady onc't by that name out in St. Louis—a leetle, lively, black-eyed, black-haired woman?"

"She answers to that description."

"Wellington gave out that she was a relative of his, but all the ladies in the neighborhood fought shy of her, but without any particular reason, as far as I could see, for she seemed to be a nice little woman enough."

"Praps she could throw some light on this hyer mystery?"

"I had a talk with her, but she said she went to bed early, and heard nothing unusual until she was awakened by the intelligence that Mr. Wellington had been murdered."

"I would like to have a little talk with her if you haven't any objection."

"Not the slightest!" Justice Palmer assented; "and it is possible she will talk more freely with you than with me, for the way she has been treated since she came here hasn't given her a good opinion of the people in the neighborhood."

"I had a notion that she was holding something back from me. Of course this may not be so; it may only be my imagination, but it will not do any harm for you to interview her, and you had better see her alone, too, as she will be more apt to speak freely than if I were present."

"All right; I will be glad of the chance."

The justice, conducting Uncle Sun Up to the parlor, sent word to the lady that an old acquaintance of Mr. Wellington's was in the parlor and would like to speak to her.

This done, Palmer departed.

Uncle Sun Up did not have long to wait.

Within five minutes the lady entered the apartment.

She was a woman of thirty-five or thereabouts, with a fine figure, rather above the medium height, and a handsome face, although her features were a little coarse.

She had brilliant black eyes, somewhat bold, and her free and easy demeanor suited well with the aggressive eyes.

The Missourian rose as she entered the room, and the lady, with a single sharp glance at him, advanced with outstretched hand.

"Well, this is an unexpected pleasure!" she exclaimed, her voice pleasant and sonorous—evidently a voice which had had careful training.

"Oh, you remember me!" exclaimed the Missourian, as he grasped the extended hand.

"Well, I should smile!" she replied, using the slang expression with an ease and grace which showed she was a citizeness of the world.

"Wait until I close the door," she continued, "for in a house like this there are plenty of listeners."

She shut the door and with a graceful gesture waved the Westerner to a seat in a big easy-chair, while she helped herself to a rocker, and drew it up close to his chair.

"I don't suppose you thought I would remember you?" she said.

"Wa-al, no, I didn't."

"Oh, I've an excellent memory for faces, and though I never met you but once—that was at the little supper that the chief of police at St. Louis gave in my honor."

"Those were gay old days, upon my word!" she exclaimed, with a sigh, evidently of regret.

"I seldom forget any one whom I once meet, and least of all is it to be expected that I should forget a gentleman whom the chief of police introduced with a grand flourish as the boss detective of the world!"

"I reckon the chief was piling on the soft-sawder, hey?" the Westerner remarked, with a grin.

"The man was as full as a tick!" the lady exclaimed, in contempt. "The champagne was too rich for his common blood and went to his head, but I guess you are A No. 1 in the detective line for all that."

"Are you going into this case?" she queried, with business-like abruptness.

"Yes, I think I shall."

"Any money in it for you?"

"None that I know of, but Wellington was an old-time acquaintance of mine, so I felt like going into the matter; and then, as I think of going into business hyer in the East, it would be a big advertisement for me if I could succeed in catching the party who did this job."

"I see, I see; it would be a big ad. for you and only some such man as yourself can do anything with it. These blunder-headed country-people will never be able to do anything."

"Bah! how I hate these country gillies! Why, do you know, Sun Up, I really believe some of these selectmen idiots have an idea I killed the man! I felt pretty sure of it from the way they cross-examined me."

"The idea! As if I had anything to gain by the man's death!"

"That is true enuff; but I don't s'pose they knew enuff to figger that way."

"No, of course; the donkeys! They didn't have sense enough to understand my position here. According to the outward seeming I had everything to gain by his living and all to lose by his death, but that isn't so, really."

"You see, I am telling you a straight story, for I know you have sense to detect when I am playing it upon you, and I don't intend to try any games."

"I reckon you air rather piling on the agony now, hain't yer?"

"Oh, no; honor bright!"

"Oh, go 'long! If a long-haired, sharp gal like you, who has been round in the world and knows the ropes, should attempt to play roots on the smartest detective that was ever raised he wouldn't stand the ghost of a show."

"Praise from Sir Hubert Stanley is praise, indeed!"

And as she uttered the quotation she rose and made a profound courtesy.

"But a truce to compliments! Let us come down to solid business, or we shall never be able to get on," she continued as she resumed her seat.

"I suppose you wonder at this transformation. The last time we met I was the bright particular star of a burlesque opera troupe, warranted to kick higher and sing worse than any other woman in the business. Miss Dickie Delaro, in letters as high as I am, was posted all over town."

"Now I am Mrs. Delaro, a widow whose husband died abroad and a distant relative of Mr. Benjamin Wellington."

"That was a fine story, wasn't it? But it didn't work worth a cent. The truth got out some way that I was a blonde burlesquer, although my hair is as black as a crow's back and none of the women in the neighborhood here dared to come near me."

"That was bad."

"Oh, I don't care! I've grown tired of this kind of a life. I thought it would be a splendid thing at first to have everything I wanted without being obliged to work for it, but I soon found that this life of elegant ease wasn't what it is cracked up to be."

"How did you happen to come? But mebbe I am intruding whar I ain't got any business to go."

"Oh, no; you are my father confessor in this case, and I might as well make a full and frank confession to you, for these deuced countrymen may take it into their heads to make considerable trouble for me, and goodness knows I don't want to be hauled up, accused of committing this murder."

"It would be all-fired disagreeable, that's a fact."

"You bet! Yes, you shall know my story, and then I think I can give you a clew to the real assassin."

"By Jink! if you kin do that it will be a big starter for me!" Uncle Sammy exclaimed.

CHAPTER XV.

A CLEW.

"LISTEN to what I have to say and then judge for yourself," the lady replied.

"To begin with my story: Since I met you at St. Louis I have been across the water—bearded the British lion in his den, and showed them what an American girl could do, right in the ancient home of burlesque."

"But the enterprise was not successful; so, after a two years' stay abroad, I returned to New York."

"The day after I landed I met Mr. Wellington at the house of a lady friend, and he pretended to be smitten with my charms at first glance."

"Good deal of nonsense about it, you know, for, if you were well acquainted with Mr. Benjamin Wellington you are probably aware that he fell in love with himself at an early age, and the passion grew so strong with the lapse of years that there was never the slightest danger of his falling enough in love with anybody else to hurt him."

Uncle Sun Up nodded.

"He professed to be captivated, though, and wanted me to marry him; but, as he explained, the ceremony couldn't take place for some time, as he was compromised with another lady, whom he had agreed to marry, and until he got rid of her our union couldn't take place, as he didn't want a breach of promise suit on his hands."

"I see; I see."

"I believed his yarn about his enormous wealth, for every one said he was a millionaire three or four times over; and, thinking that a

prize like that was worth waiting for, I consented to his proposal that I should come and take charge of his house here, giving out that I was a widow and a relative of his, so that no scandal should arise.

"The scheme didn't work, though!" she exclaimed, in a tone of contempt. "Some idiot who had seen me on the stage somewhere let the cat out of the bag, and none of the dear dames in the neighborhood were anxious to associate with the actress."

"Not that I cared two cents for that, though! I had my revenge by being the best-dressed woman for miles around, and all the men were ready to worship me if I had let them."

"After I had been here six months I saw that something was the matter with the scheme which Wellington had proposed; he couldn't carry it out, although I believe the man honestly wanted to, but the woman was in the way—a woman who kept persistently in the background so that I could not find out who she was, and from certain things which in unguarded moments Wellington let fall I came to the conclusion that he stood in terror of the woman."

"The moment I discovered this I made up my mind to find out who was the woman."

"Nat'ral—very nat'ral!"

"It was a difficult task; but at last I became convinced that the woman was a young snip of a girl who has been holding her head so high that the dainty dames who thought they could not afford to call upon me, were delighted to be able to rank themselves among her acquaintances."

"Possibly you have heard of this fine demoiselle, Miss Adrienne De Courcy, the ward of Benoni Wellraven, who lives just across the way on Orienta Point."

And as she spoke she pointed through the window to where the towers of Sound View Grange rose grim and strong.

Uncle Sun Up was astounded at this disclosure, for it was totally unexpected.

"Sakes alive!" he cried, "ain't you made some mistake?"

"Not the slightest; Adrienne De Courcy is the girl! Wellington was corresponding with her, for I saw part of an unfinished letter which he had written and then destroyed for some reason."

"He threw the pieces into the grate, but the fire was low and so they did not blaze up immediately, but slowly smoldered away, and I came into the room in time to see a small portion of the top part of the sheet which had blown up against the back of the grate, and I distinctly read these words:

"My dear Miss De Courcy, it is imperative that I should see you as soon as possible in regard to the matter upon which—"

"And there the fire had cut off the rest."

Uncle Sun Up followed her with the closest attention.

Here was a clew which was worth following up; that is, if the woman's statement could be depended upon.

"This hyer is mighty important," he observed. "Thar's a clew into it which if followed might lead to something."

"I s'pose you know the gal has disappeared and that no one knows whar she has gone?"

"Oh, yes; it doesn't take long for news to travel in a place like this."

"Mighty mysterious affair, hey?" Uncle Sammy remarked, with a sidewise glance at the woman.

"Not to me," she replied, promptly, "and I judge from the peculiar glance which you have just given me that you have your ideas in regard to the matter too."

"Oh, yes; I'm chock-full of idees, and no mistake," he responded.

"Doesn't the fact that the girl disappeared on the very night that Wellington fell by the hand of an assassin suggest to you that there may be some connection between the two events?"

"It's rayther a wild guess, but I will own up that the moment I heard of the two things the thought came to me that the one might have something to do with the other."

"What would you say if I was to tell you that the girl, Adrienne De Courcy, was *here* in this house at nine o'clock on the night when the murder was committed?"

Slowly, impressively and with a lowered tone the woman delivered the question.

"Wal, I should say that it was 'tarnal queer," Uncle Sammy replied, evidently deeply affected by the disclosure.

"We-all, she *was* here at nine o'clock that night!" Miss Delaro repeated firmly, "holding a secret interview with Benjamin Wellington, and two hours later he was dead."

"Do you think she killed him at that time?"

"Oh, no; for I saw her leave the house and heard him speak to her as she passed through the window."

"She came by boat, I s'pose?"

"Yes, and she was disguised in a plain, dark dress with a worsted cloud fastened around her head."

"The head-dress was also dark in color, so she looked like a housemaid, and no one who did

not take a good look at her would be apt to recognize in her the brilliant heiress of Sound View Grange."

"My room is right over the library, and when on this particular evening Wellington told me he was going to shut himself up until bed-time as he had a lot of letters to write, my suspicions were at once excited."

"I jumped immediately to the conclusion that he expected a visitor, and I made up my mind to see who it was."

"The night was very dark, and I was somewhat puzzled to guess how I would be able to keep my watch without being detected, but I extinguished the gas and opened the window."

"Soon after I began my watch I heard the sound of oars, and then Wellington came from the library and went down to the water's edge, and I at once guessed who the visitor was."

"Miss Adrienne had rowed across from Orienta. I saw her distinctly both come and go."

"Now, what was there to prevent her from returning afterward and striking down the man with whom, in some way, she was compromised?"

"Thar are some mighty big gaps in this hyer story, but still it is worth looking into," the detective observed.

"This Miss De Courcy is an elegant girl—a reg'lar daisy, while our friend Wellington was old, not the kind of man to win the affections of a brilliant young gal."

"It was his money which was the attraction!" Miss Delaro exclaimed, in contempt.

"Either she or some one else, bled the man to death! It was understood, when I assumed command here, that I was to have a liberal allowance, but lately it has been difficult to get any cash out of the man. He was short of funds, he said, losses in the stock market to meet and all sorts of excuses, and after the discovery of the murder I took advantage of the confusion to 'go through' the safe which was open. I thought it was only fair to protect myself, you know."

"Certainly, of course," and Uncle Sammy laughed at the frank confession.

"But I only had my labor for my pains, for not a single thing of any value could I find, and that seemed to me to be very strange."

"The only explanation I can give is that the old donkey was infatuated with this dashing belle, and allowed her to get all his money away from him."

"Mebbe he was a fraud and never had any money?" the Westerner suggested.

"But where did the wealth come from that kept this place up?" she queried.

"I'll never tell yer—until I find out, but I reckon I'll have to look into this missing gal business; I must interview Mr. Wellraven."

"He's a pompous old pump, as stiff as a ram-rod!" was the lady's comment upon Benoni Wellraven as the Missourian departed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MASTER OF SOUND VIEW GRANGE.

UNCLE SUN UP found Justice Palmer waiting for him.

"What do you think of her?" the justice asked.

"She is the party whom I expected to meet."

"Do you think she had anything to do with the crime?"

"Nary time."

And Uncle Sammy shook his head in a decided manner.

"She is an adventuress, no doubt, and not particular how she gets money as long as the ducats come tumbling in; but murder isn't at all in her line."

"Some accomplice might have done the job for her."

"But what object did she have for wishing the man dead?" Uncle Sun Up asked, shrewdly.

"No one commits a crime without some motive, and in this case, so far as I can see, the woman had everything to gain if he lived, but his death, on the contrary, has deprived her of an easy living."

"My idee about the matter is that, in order to find the assassin we must first discover a motive for the deed."

"Robbery doesn't seem to be at the bottom of it, but revenge may be, or the dead man stood in somebody's way, and so it was necessary to remove him."

"It is about as deep and dark a mystery, I presume, as you ever came across," Justice Palmer remarked.

"Yes; it is a difficult case, and at present I am only groping in the dark, hoping that some light may come."

"Jest keep it quiet for the present, justice, 'bout my business," Uncle Sun Up said in conclusion, "as I like the looks of your town and reckon, mebbe, that I will settle down hyer if I kin find a nice place to suit me."

Then Uncle Sun Up winked knowingly.

"You need not be alarmed. I shall be careful not to give the matter away; if you find any clews and need help, just call on me."

And Palmer returned the wink.

The Westerner thanked the justice, and then getting into the carriage was driven away.

"I reckon you kin take me over to Orienta," he said to the driver after they had crossed the little river which runs up from the bay and the horses were climbing up the steep hill which leads to the old Boston post road.

"Seeing as how I can't call on my old friend, Ben Wellington, I will try if Mister Wellraven remembers me, although he has got to be sich a great gun now that, mebbe, he won't care to see old acquaintances who knew him when he wasn't so well off."

In due time the hack arrived at Orienta and the passenger was deposited at the gates of Sound View Grange.

Uncle Sam as he looked around at the evidence of wealth so lavishly displayed on every hand came to the conclusion that the reports of Benoni Wellraven's riches were not exaggerated.

The porter, a well-fed and rather pompous middle-aged Irishman, was not inclined to receive the rough-looking stranger with much civility, and when the Missourian asked if the master of the mansion was at home replied that he didn't know whether he was or not.

But, to use the vernacular, Uncle Sammy immediately took the starch out of him by bursting into one of his hearty laughs and exclaiming:

"Wa-al, I know he is 'cos I come by appointment. Jest you waddle up to the shanty as fast as your legs kin carry you and tell the boss that Samuel Sun Up from New York is hyer on the business that he telegraphed 'bout this morning."

Uncle Sun Up spoke with such an air of assurance that the Irishman felt certain that he was some man of importance, despite his odd appearance, and so, changing his tone he said, quite civilly, that if the "gentleman would be afther walking to the house," one of the servants there would take in the message.

So up to the elaborate mansion went the Missourian, accosted a servant and sent in his message.

The answer was speedily returned that he was to walk into the reception-room.

Uncle Sun Up took a seat, and, as he glanced around, muttered the thoughts which were in his mind.

"Mighty grand now I tell you! Everything that money kin buy; everything that the heart of man can wish for apparently, but all this finery—all this money won't save him from the lightning bolts of justice when the Lord gits good and ready to strike!"

The sound of footsteps in the hall without interrupted the Missourian's meditations.

A moment later Benoni Wellraven, the master of the mansion, entered the room.

He was a tall, well-built man, and once had evidently been what would be called a handsome fellow, but now his face was pale and seamed with the dark lines that the unrelenting hand of care draws so freely upon the human visage.

He looked like anything but a happy man. The skin was drawn tightly over his high cheek-bones, and his restless black eyes were deep-sunken in their sockets.

His face was smoothly shaven and he wore his jet-black hair quite long, which gave him a ministerial appearance.

As he came in he cast a sharp, searching glance at Uncle Sun Up, who rose from his seat and bowing respectfully, presented his card to Mr. Wellraven:

SAMUEL SUN UP,

Private Detective,

was the inscription thereon.

"Yours to command," observed Uncle Sun Up, as the millionaire read the inscription aloud.

"Be seated, sir," said Wellraven in the firm, decisive tones, which had become a second nature to him.

Uncle Sammy obeyed.

Wellraven also sat down.

"Are you connected with the New York Police Department," the millionaire asked.

"Oh, no, I jog along on my own hook," Uncle Sun Up replied, with his usual good-natured grin.

"The superintendent sent you then, I presume."

"Oh, no, I came on my own account."

It was evident from the expression that came over the face of Wellraven he did not exactly understand this matter, and was inclined to be suspicious that there was something wrong about it.

Uncle Sam hastened to explain.

"You see, sir, these hyer leetle things will leak out once in a while, and you can't 'most alway, generally, for a certainty, tell how the old thing does work."

"I got onto the snap, and as I have had a fair degree of success in some pretty difficult jobs, I thought I would like to try my luck on this one."

Uncle Sun Up spoke in such a matter-of-fact, business-like way that it produced a favorable impression upon the millionaire.

"What arrangement do you generally make—what are your terms?"

"Oh, I never make any particular arrangement when I am dealing with a gentleman like yourself," answered Uncle Sun Up, in his easy way.

"I allers goes ahead, pays my own expenses, and if I do the trick then I reckon I will get what is about right."

This statement removed the suspicion which had crept into the mind of the millionaire that his visitor was one of the army of frauds who "strike" men of well-known wealth for small sums under pretense of doing them service.

"Under those conditions I should be glad to have you try what you can do in this case."

"Let me get a few p'int's," and the Missourian took out his note-book and pencil.

"The young lady's name I have and her description, also the description of how she was dressed."

"Is the young lady any relative of yours?—of course you understand, Mr. Wellraven, that I ain't a-trying to pry into your family affairs," Uncle Sun Up hastened to explain.

"I am only asking for information that will be apt to aid me in this case."

"Certainly, certainly, I understand that."

"No, the girl is not a blood relative, but only a distant connection of my late wife."

"I am her guardian."

"I see; when do you suppose she quitted the house?"

"Well, her absence was not discovered until about midnight; but then as no one in the house saw her after eight o'clock, it is possible that she may have gone away at an early hour in the evening."

"This is a kinder delicate case, and a man has got to be as keeful as though he was treading among eggs—now, I hope you won't git riled if I put questions that may appear to be kinder s'arching."

"Go ahead, sir! you may ask anything you please in regard to the girl, and I will answer to the best of my ability."

Although the millionaire spoke in the frankest manner, yet from the peculiar contraction of the lines between his eyes, the Missourian got the impression that Wellraven would not disclose all he knew.

"Was thar any reason why the girl should quit the house?"

"None in the world that I know of. She was entirely happy to all appearances; her every wish was gratified, and the news of her disappearance came upon me with the suddenness of a lightning stroke."

"Had the lady been long acquainted with this Mr. Wellington who was murdered over yonder?"

And Uncle Sammy pointed as he spoke to Rye Neck Point.

CHAPTER XVII.

NO PROGRESS.

THE question, so unexpected, took the millionaire completely by surprise.

"What do you say?" he exclaimed. "My ward acquainted with Mr. Wellington?"

"Yes. I asked how long she had been acquainted with him."

"Why, she was not acquainted with him at all to my knowledge! Why do you ask such a question?"

"Then the thought has never come to you that there is a connection between the death of this Benjamin Wellington and the disappearance of your ward?"

This second question astounded the millionaire apparently fully as much as the first one, for he stared in amazement at the Missourian.

"Really, sir, these questions of yours take me completely by surprise."

"The idea never suggested itself to my mind. I never even dreamed that there could be any possible connection between the two events."

"I presume you would be awfully astonished if I were to tell you that she was at his house between eight and nine o'clock on the night of the murder."

"At his house!" cried Wellraven, so amazed at the intelligence that he could not help showing it in the strongest manner.

"Yes, she made him a secret visit, and wore a plain, dark suit, such as she was not in the habit of wearing, as a disguise."

"Impossible, impossible!" Wellraven cried, terribly disturbed at this statement. "There is some mistake about this matter! You have been deceived!"

"Oh, no, I haven't—not in my judgment. Of course, I will admit that there is always a possibility of a man being deceived about anything that he can't know of his own personal knowledge, but I think I am right in this."

Your ward crossed the water from this place in a boat, under cover of the darkness, landed on the lawn, which runs to the water's edge, you know, and then made her way to the house, entering by way of the library window."

"Wellington was in the library waiting to receive her. She remained in the house for about an hour and then departed in the same manner in which she had come."

"But she was observed."

Wellington had shut himself up in the library, early in the evening, leaving orders that he was not to be disturbed, as he expected a visitor, and curiosity prompted my informant to keep watch in order to ascertain who the visitor was."

A peculiar expression passed rapidly over the face of Wellraven as he listened, and Uncle Sun Up, acute as he had certainly shown himself to be, was puzzled to account for it, but as far as he could judge, the millionaire was greatly disturbed by learning the fact that there had been some one on the watch in Wellington's mansion on the night of the murder.

Was it possible then that his ignorance in regard to his niece's visit was only assumed?

Did he know that under cover of the night she had crossed the water and held an interview with Wellington?

It was a few moments before Wellraven spoke; he was evidently deliberating over the matter.

"Is this witness a credible one?" he asked, at last.

"I refer to the person who claims to have seen my ward make this nocturnal visit."

"Oh, yes; there isn't any doubt about that."

"Servants are apt to tell marvelous stories sometimes," Wellraven suggested, fixing his glassy eyes full upon the jolly, round face of the Western detective.

"And sometimes they are prone to make statements which they think will be well received without any regard to the truth."

"Nothing of the kind in this case, to the best of my knowledge and belief!" Uncle Sammy replied, decidedly. "This party knows what it is talking about and is one of the kind who will not allow imagination to run away with them."

"Besides this same party saw a fragment of a letter in Wellington's handwriting addressed to your ward."

"Is it possible?" the millionaire cried, interrupting Uncle Sun Up with so genuine an expression of amazement upon his countenance that the detective could not bring himself to believe that it was feigned.

"Yes, so the party declares, and I feel pretty sure the statement can be depended upon, for there isn't the slightest reason, as far as I can see, why anything but the truth should come from this person."

"The writing upon the scrap of paper ran about this way:

"My dear Miss Adrienne, it is imperative that I should see you as soon as possible—"

"And there it ended, the rest of the sheet being destroyed."

The millionaire pondered over the matter for a moment, his brows contracted in thought.

"I will not attempt to conceal from you, my dear sir, that I am very much disturbed by these statements," he said, at length.

"The more so, because they are entirely unexpected and have taken me completely by surprise. I never even dreamed of coupling the fact of my ward's mysterious disappearance with the murder of Benjamin Wellington, whom for years I have regarded as an extremely disagreeable man."

"We were once connected with the same business-house, and so I have known him a long time, but he was so objectionable to me on several accounts that for many years we have been almost as distant as strangers."

"I have had business transactions with him, though, and I rather think it would have been wise if I had not."

"He wanted ready money some time ago and he contrived to talk me into advancing him fifty thousand dollars, taking a mortgage on his place yonder as security."

"I acted heedlessly and without examining into the matter as carefully as I should have done."

"I didn't even consult my lawyers about it, nor take the counsel of a real-estate expert, but, in fact, I gave the man the money to get rid of him. I supposed, though, I was perfectly safe. I had an idea he was a man of means, and thought the money would be speedily returned, as he promised it would be, but I have since heard whispers he was nothing more than an irresponsible speculator, and that all he had in the world was that property yonder."

"I presume I am out about twenty thousand dollars on the investment, for it seems to be the general opinion that the estate is not worth over thirty thousand dollars, and if it is forced to a sale it may not reach that amount."

"Yes, I reckon your statement in regard to his financial standing is about correct. I had a talk with Justice Palmer, who has taken charge of the case, and he tells me that the man hasn't left anything, as far as he can discover."

"But to return to your ward's case: she disappeared anywhere from eight o'clock to twelve, you say? Have you been able to trace her at all—inquired at the depot?"

"Yes, and not the slightest trace; none of the station men saw her—and they are all well acquainted with her."

"She may have walked to the next station, either up or down."

"I thought of that and made inquiries, but could not gain any intelligence."

"Well, I will do the best I can," and Uncle Sun Up arose as if to depart.

"A moment! Did this party who saw my ward see anybody else that might reasonably be suspected?"

"Not a soul," replied the Westerner, and then he took his departure.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE TRACK.

UNCLE SAMMY was not a man to allow the grass to grow under his feet.

When he returned to his carriage he addressed the driver in the most innocent way in the world.

"I swow! he treated me fu'st-rate, and I'll be hanged if I ain't a-going to see if I can't do something for him in this matter."

"I've got plenty of time to spare and, durn me, if I don't go for to play detective myself awhile."

"Say! have you got any engagements ahead?"

The driver responded in the negative.

"Then I'll engage you for the day, and we'll jest see if we can't find some trace of the missing gal. What will you charge?"

The driver named a reasonable sum, anxious to be of assistance, and Uncle Sun Up closed the bargain at once.

He reasoned that the girl had probably gone to New York, and of course must use the railroad to reach the city.

But in order to evade pursuit she had walked to another station than the one where she was pretty certain to be recognized and had taken the train there.

Acting on this idea, Uncle Sun Up had the hackman drive him to the two stations below Mamaroneck, thinking it would be natural for the fugitive to strike toward the city; but at neither one of the two did he succeed in gaining any information, although at the lower one, which was New Rochelle, the depôt-master stated that on the last train to the city there were plenty of lady passengers, as usually there is, and as he had not noticed any one of them particularly it was probable she could have got on board of the train without exciting any attention.

Of one thing though he was certain, and that was that no lady answering to the description of Miss De Courcy had purchased a ticket from him, either for New York or anywhere else, for that matter.

Still that did not prove conclusively that she had not taken passage on the train, for, as he said, if she happened to arrive on the platform just as the train was ready to start there wouldn't have been time for her to get a ticket, and she would have taken the train and settled for her fare with the conductor.

This suggested an idea to the Missourian immediately, and he asked how it would be possible to see the conductor who had run this particular train.

In reply he was told that the gentleman would be up on the next train, as it was his "run."

Uncle Sammy then dismissed the coach with instructions to drive to Harrison, the station above Mamaroneck, and wait for him there.

It being the detective's idea to go to that point on the incoming train.

On the trip he knew he would find time to interview the conductor.

The result was unproductive, though. The conductor was well acquainted with the matter, having been previously subjected to a cross-examination by Benoni Wellraven, whom he knew full well.

The gentleman was also personally acquainted with Miss Adrienne, who often traveled up and down from the city on his train.

"If she had gone into the city with me that night I surely would have known it, unless she disguised herself in such a manner as not to be readily recognized," he said, decidedly.

"If she was dressed differently from the way she generally dressed, say plainly, and in some dark clothes, so as not to attract attention, wore a veil and kept it down, as some women are apt to do in the cars to keep the cinders and dust out of their eyes, then the chances are big that I should not have noticed her at all."

"I remember it was a very crowded train; nearly every seat was occupied when we got to Mount Vernon, and twenty-five or thirty passengers got on there, and nearly all of them were ladies."

"My hands were full that 'run,' for it was a heavy train, and, scattered through the cars, here and there, were about a dozen countrymen, Irish and Dutch, who had a good deal of liquor on board and were disposed to be ugly."

"So you can set it down for a fact, that if the girl was on the train in disguise, the chances are about a thousand to one that I wouldn't have recognized her."

And this was all the information Uncle Sun Up was able to obtain from the conductor, excepting that he volunteered the opinion that he didn't think the inquiries would procure any information at Harrison, for, to the best of his

remembrance, there were only three passengers got on at that station, and they were all men.

And it was as the conductor said.

No one at the little station knew anything about the girl.

As he was obliged to wait some time for his hack to arrive, the Missourian whiled the time away by speculating in regard to the case.

The thought seemed monstrous that such a fair young belle, as Adrienne De Courcy was reported to be, should stain her hands with the blood of an old reprobate, as Benjamin Wellington evidently was.

But the evidence all tended to show that it was she—the secret nocturnal visitor, who had done the deed.

And the motive—for no such dreadful crime as this is ever committed without some powerful motive—was that the beautiful girl was in some way compromised by Wellington, and fearing he would betray her secret—possibly he had so threatened—in a mad fit of desperation she struck the murderous blow, although from the fact that she had come provided with a knife, it really looked as if she had crossed the water determined upon executing the bloody deed.

Benoni Wellraven, too, either knew of the girl's act, before, or after the deed was committed, and it was his cunning brain that had arranged the plan of her escape.

But he evidently had not calculated that that fact would lead to her being suspected of having committed the crime, for he had appeared like a man thunderstruck when the idea was suggested to him.

This was the theory of the crime that the discoveries he had made suggested to him, but Uncle Sun Up was not exactly satisfied.

"Thar's something else in the background," he muttered. "Whar did Wellington get the money to build this expensive mansion? Whar did the wealth come from that he has been throwing away as freely as though he had a gold mine at his back?"

"If I could only get at the heart of that mystery, mebbe, I would find thar is somebody else in the world besides this leetle gal whose mind would feel a great deal easier with Ben Wellington dead than with Ben Wellington living!"

"But how kin I git hold of the tail of that air rat when I can't see signs of him nowhar, not even his hole?"

"It's 'bout time now that Uncle Sun Up should disappear for awhile, as he's done 'bout all in these diggings that thar is for him to do, and a new character must appear on the scene."

Absorbed in such reflections as these the Missourian paced up and down the station platform until the carriage arrived.

Then, getting into it, he was driven back to Mamaroneck.

On the way he questioned the driver in regard to a boarding-house, and found to his satisfaction the driver himself could accommodate him.

This suited the game of the Western detective exactly, for the young man did not make a practice of taking boarders, and as there was only himself, his wife, and a baby, in the house, there wouldn't be any one to play the spy upon him.

Uncle Sun Up was driven to the house, introduced to the wife, and all the arrangements made, then he proceeded to the depot just in time to catch the train for New York.

As he explained to the young man, it was necessary for him to go to the city and get his trunk.

"Wa-al, I've made a beginning, but nothing to boast of," Uncle Sammy muttered, as he settled back in his seat when the train started.

"I've got some wires laid, though, and, mebbe, with the aid of Miss Dickie Delaro, I may be able to work some of 'em!"

CHAPTER XIX.

CHECK TO THE KING.

MISS DICKIE DELARO, the ex-burlesque queen, had managed to feather her nest pretty well during her sojourn beneath the roof-tree of Castle Point.

When the aged Wellington—who was not a good looking man, being short in stature, quite stout, and with a round, quite free upon which the life of dissipation which he had led for years had left visible marks—first made known to the brilliant, and really handsome burlesque actress, that he had fallen desperately in love with her, and expressed the opinion she was the most charming creature he had ever seen, the lady, with her usual impudence, fairly laughed in his face, but Wellington was not in the least offended, but laughed also.

He said, humbly, he knew nature had not fitted him to be the companion of so glorious a creature as the burlesque queen, but, to make up for that, fortune had bestowed bountiful wealth upon him, and if she would be graciously pleased to allow him to blind her eyes with his gold, the measure of his earthly happiness would be complete.

It is an old saying that the woman who hesitates is lost.

And it was so in this case.

Wellington was not willing to take no for an answer. He pressed his suit persistently, showed the richest kinds of gifts upon her, and as all her companions became "green with envy," as she expressed it, that she should have the good fortune to ensnare the heart of a millionaire, she at last came to look upon her persistent suitor with favorable eyes.

Then came his explanation of how he was situated—that he could not marry at present on account of certain disagreeable complications in which he was involved, but he suggested that in the guise of a distant relative she could take charge of his mansion, as he was sick of house-keeping.

She agreed to this on condition that he would pay her a certain monthly sum, for she declared she would not undertake the labor of superintending servants without she was well paid for it.

The bargain was made, for Wellington was fairly infatuated with the woman, who was far superior to the usual run of her class, and Miss Delaro took charge.

She had a genius for management, and Wellington's mansion was made comfortable for him.

So, in addition to her regular salary, he lavished money upon her, and she, although as a rule one of the most extravagant and thoughtless of women, prudently put some of her gains away, and when she was asked to choose a present, selected diamonds, knowing that if the golden shower came to an end and she needed money, she could easily procure it on her gems.

Some subtle instinct, latent in her nature, had seemed to warn her that this prosperity would not last.

The crash had come, and once again she must face the world without a protector.

She sat in her room, looking out of the window upon the dancing sunlit waters of the Sound.

Her mind was in a contented state, despite the abrupt downfall of her "castle in the air."

"I shall not be the wife of a millionaire after all," she mused, as she drummed listlessly upon the window pane with her white and slender fingers, ornamented with an abundance of jeweled rings.

"Honestly now, to confess the truth to myself, like a candid girl, I never really believed I would be."

"The thing always seemed to me too good to be true, and so I am not nearly so disappointed as I would have been if I had set my heart upon it."

"What a strange thing presentiments are too; right from the first I have had a sort of a feeling that this basking in the sunshine of prosperity would not last long."

"Not that I am particularly in love with such a life, for there isn't enough excitement about it to suit me."

"I confess I like the stage-life better, but then business has been so poor the past few years that there hasn't been any money in it."

"But to return to presentiments."

"Wasn't it strange that I, a notorious spendthrift, should take it into my head I ought to put away some money when my future was apparently secure?"

"Who can explain the riddle excepting that some good angel is looking out for me and forced me to be prudent, for once in my life?"

"Thanks to the instinct I am not in the least troubled by this unfortunate affair."

"What a fraud the man was too! pretending that he was rolling in wealth, talking about the railroad stocks and the bank shares he owned, and all such nonsense, when in reality he has nothing."

"But then, how in the name of all that is wonderful, has he had so much money to spend?"

"Or did he have money and has it just become exhausted?"

The conundrum was too difficult for the girl, and after puzzling over it for a moment she dismissed it from her mind.

"I wish I could go away!" she exclaimed, abruptly. "It was dull enough here before, when Wellington was living, but now it will be terrible."

"I can't go though until something is done about solving this murder mystery. I can see with half an eye that some of the idiots suspect that I had a finger in the pie; the fools!"

"Do they suppose that I was crazy enough to kill the goose which laid the golden eggs?"

"While he lived I was sure of a handsome support—that is, it appeared that way, before his death brought out the fact that he had nothing."

"Even if he had chosen to change his mind and had come to the conclusion to marry some other woman instead of me, he would have been obliged to settle with me in a handsome manner for the disappointment."

"I had every reason in the world to wish Wellington to live, and the man who thinks I had anything to do with the murder is a fool!"

At this point a servant brought the intelligence that a gentleman desired to see Miss Delaro.

Descending to the parlor she found there a

short, stout, middle-aged gentleman, whose prominent features distinctly betrayed the fact that he was a descendant of the chosen people—the race of Israel.

An oily, pleasant gentleman, who had a peculiar fashion of frequently wringing his hands together as though he was washing them in invisible water.

"Miss Delaro?" he said, rising and bowing in an extremely elaborate fashion.

"Yes, sir," replied the lady, acknowledging the salute in a suitable manner.

And the impression instantly came upon her that the stranger was some wily Hebrew who had gone into the theatrical business and had come to negotiate with her with a view to an engagement.

"Allow me to introduce myself. Jacob Hammerstein, of Rio Janiero, Brazil. I have the honor to be the manager of the Grand Opera House in Rio, and I have visited you for the purpose of seeing if you cannot be induced to once again appear on the stage which you in the past have so adorned."

Miss Delaro felt impelled to make her most elaborate courtesy at this compliment, and then begging her visitor to excuse her for a moment, she went and closed the parlor doors.

"Since you come upon business it is as well that there shouldn't be any listeners to the interview," she remarked, with a charming smile.

"Quite proper!" the gentleman exclaimed.

"I trust you will excuse my intruding upon you at a season when private grief claims you for its own," he continued, with another profound bow, "but my excuse must be that time presses, and time and tide, railroad trains and Express steamers wait for no man."

"Very true."

"My preparations are all complete for my season in Rio, and I am ready to start for my home in the Southern seas, but happening by chance to hear there was a possibility, owing to the sad accident which has happened to the head of this household, that you might be tempted to resume your professional career again I made bold to call upon you."

Now, it seemed so strange to the girl, considering that the tragedy was of such recent occurrence, that any one should suggest to this stranger that she would be apt to resume the practice of her profession again that she did not hesitate to ask him who it was that spoke in regard to her.

"Will mademoiselle pardon me if I reply that I am not at liberty to give the name of my informant?" the other replied, with the most charming smile and bow.

"It is the gentleman's own wish."

"He said Miss Delaro will probably be inquisitive. She is a woman and it is the privilege of her sex, but tell her from me that it really does not make any difference."

"I am an unknown admirer of her talents and beauty, and would be glad to do her a service."

"The gentleman is an old friend of mine. I was connected with the establishment over which he presided years ago; that was before I did anything in the theatrical line."

"I met him accidentally a few days ago in company with some mutual friends, and a conversation in regard to amusement matters ensued."

"One of the gentlemen present mentioned your name and wondered what had become of you, and this gentleman, happening to know, supplied the information."

"Then another one of the party suggested that it would be a grand idea for me to secure you for a tour in Brazil, but this admirer of yours said it would not be possible as you had abandoned the stage, and, possibly, for good."

"I expressed my regrets, and the conversation, as far as you were concerned, ended at that point. But, this morning I received a telegram telling me to call upon you immediately, as there was now a chance that you might be secured for a trip."

"Mademoiselle, I pride myself upon my promptness in business affairs!"

"It is a motto ever dear to my heart to strike when the iron is hot, and so here I am, and to come immediately to business I offer you a two years' engagement under my management in Brazil, with the privilege of two more years at my option."

"Salary, one hundred dollars in gold per week, and your hotel and traveling expenses, including also your maid's board and traveling."

"Passage from this country to Rio for yourself and maid to be paid, also your return passage at the end of the engagement, with the understanding that your cabin on board the steamships shall be the best that can be procured, and your hotel accommodations will be first-class in every particular."

"The money to defray the first year's salary to be deposited in any bank in New York that you may be pleased to name, on the day the contract is signed, as security for my responsibility. And as time presses, the contract to be signed to-day, and you must sail by the steamer which departs at six this evening."

The girl understood the scheme in an instant. This was a cunning device to get her out of the country.

CHAPTER XX.

THE INQUEST.

DESPITE the clear head and the large amount of common sense that Miss "Dickie" Delaro possessed, for a moment she was bewildered.

"Leave for Brazil in the steamer which sails this evening?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, that is the arrangement."

"But it will not be possible for me to go. I am a witness at the inquest which is to take place here at noon."

"That is to say, within an hour?" remarked the visitor, consulting the expensive gold watch which he wore, attached to a chain as big around as a stout middle finger.

"Yes, in an hour."

"That inquest will not be a very lengthy proceeding, I am informed," the gentleman remarked. "Possibly not over an hour, say two at the outside. Then how long will it take you to pack up?"

"Not over an hour."

"You can be ready to leave here by four o'clock beyond a doubt. An hour to run into town brings it to five. I will meet you at the depot with a coach, and by six I can have you on the deck of the steamer, and an hour later you will be well down New York Bay."

Miss Delaro laughed at the cool and precise way in which the programme was laid out.

"You have not allowed for any accidents," she observed.

"What kind of a programme could any one arrange if they allowed for interruptions?"

"That is very true."

And then the lady became thoughtful for a moment.

"Suppose I should accept your offer and go," she remarked at last, "have you any idea what the people around here would say about it?"

The Hebrew manager snapped his fingers in contempt.

"That for the people around here!" he cried. "What does their opinion amount to, anyway? A lot of nobodies who vegetate in this dreadful place and cheat themselves with the belief that they are living."

"Bah! I would rather be in my grave than condemned to live in such a miserable hole as this!"

"Yes, it is very lonesome at times," and the woman heaved a sigh as back to her recollection came the memory of the gay scenes in which she had figured in the bright and brilliant past so conspicuously.

"And the opinion of the people around here doesn't amount to much, as you justly remark, and it is lucky that they don't, for they will be apt to give me rats if I go away from here in this unceremonious manner."

"In fact the most of them will be sure to say that I ran away, and the chances are about a million to one that the majority of the inhabitants of this neighborhood will be certain to declare the reason why I fled was because I am guilty of the murder of this unfortunate man, and ran away for fear of being arrested."

The Hebrew speculator laughed merrily.

Any one who heard him would be apt to believe that he thought the thing a most excellent joke.

"The notion is so ridiculous!" he exclaimed, after he got through with his fit of laughter.

"Not really so ridiculous as you imagine; that is, not from the standpoint at which these people in the neighborhood here will look at it."

"In the first place I am not in good repute with my most excellent neighbors."

"Some of them amount to something, like Mr. Wellraven across at Orienta, and there are a few others who really have some money to back up their pretensions, but the rest are a lot of half-starved bank-clerks and little petty business men, whose salaries or income run from twelve to fifteen hundred dollars a year, and they attempt to set up as country gentlemen on that limited amount of money."

"Quite a number take boarders in the summer, not for vulgar money, you know, not because they want to make anything out of it, oh, dear, no!" and Miss Delaro clasped her hands together and rolled up her eyes in mock horror, giving such a capital imitation of an affected, "genteel" matron that again the Hebrew speculator was convulsed with laughter.

"Oh, no, they don't take boarders," continued the brilliant woman, still keeping up the imitation.

"Dear sakes, no! they wouldn't do anything so vulgar and common for the world!"

"They only accommodate a few friends just for the sake of their company, while Mr. Jones, or Smith is in town, for they are so lonesome."

"Yes, yes, you draw the picture to the life. Beggars on horseback, I was about to say, but they are really beggars without horses."

"And this delightful 'crowd,' to speak quite plainly, took it into their heads to turn up their noses at me, because the report got around that I had once been an actress, and, horror on horror's head! a burlesque actress at that!"

"So I have been cut by the neighborhood in the most complete manner ever since I resided here."

"It isn't pleasant, you know, although you don't care two cents for the people."

"And now if I go away, the way they will turn upon and rend me will be a caution."

"My dear Miss Delaro, there's an old proverb which says, 'Hard words break no bones.'"

"And to return to what I was about to say, don't you think that they will have cause to talk?" she said, keeping to the point she had in view with the dogged persistency which is so great a part of some women's nature.

"Just look at it yourself. Here I take French leave the very moment the inquest is over; in fact, taking my departure at the earliest possible moment."

"Doesn't it really look as though there was some urgent reason for the step?"

"And so there is; you want to collar—excuse my 'French'—a hundred dollars a week, clear, in gold; and mind you, although I don't want you to think that I consider you are not worth it—for you are—worth every penny you can get, yet there isn't many burlesque actresses on the stage to-day who wouldn't jump at the offer."

"You are to sing only in first-class houses and you will be made the bright particular star of the troupe."

"Oh, yes, but I may not be able to get away; the officers may want to hold me."

"What for?"

"Goodness knows, I don't!" Miss Delaro replied, with an expressive shrug of her charming shoulders.

"Oh, no, the party who posted me in regard to you told me something of this melancholy business; I, of course, of my own knowledge know nothing whatever about it."

"He said that there was a foolish suspicion current that you had something to do with the death of the man, but that it would be impossible for any one to bring forward any proof that you were concerned in the matter, and you could not be legally held even if some of the people were inclined to advise the adoption of such a course."

"Mr. Hammerstein, why don't you act frankly and aboveboard with me in this matter?" the woman exclaimed, abruptly, fixing her brilliant black eyes full on his face.

The Hebrew appeared a little confused by the scrutiny, although he was a man who boasted of his self-possession.

"Perhaps I don't understand exactly what you mean," he observed, evidently uneasy.

"Perhaps you do not, and then again perhaps you do."

"But I can tell you right at the beginning the way to get along with me is to treat me as if you thought I had a deal of sense; I shall be flattered by the compliment and will never take the trouble to question whether you believe it or not."

"This idea of an expedition to Brazil is all a plan to get me out of this country and keep me out of it from two to four years, as the party whom you represent may dictate."

"If you go, you will certainly go out of the country, and if you stay there, you surely will not come back here," and after this remark the Hebrew laid back in his chair and grinned as if he thought he had said an extremely smart thing.

"A truce to joking!" the girl exclaimed, impatiently. "It is the truth, isn't it?"

"The idea of this trip did not originate with you?"

"I certainly stated, quite openly and in the presence of a number of gentlemen, that I would be glad to secure you for a trip to Brazil."

"Ah, now you are quibbling with me!" Miss Delaro exclaimed, quickly.

She was too expert in this juggling with words herself not to detect the trick the instant it was tried upon her.

"Come! you must be honest with me or I shall not go, and that will be some money out of your pocket."

And the moment she finished the speech she saw by the expression upon the face of the Jew speculator that the shot had struck home.

"Miss Delaro, I wouldn't attempt to deceive you for the world!" he exclaimed.

"Besides, with such an extremely sharp lady as yourself, I doubt if the trick could be done," he continued, with a gallant bow.

"Oh, I'm business from the word go!" she answered, with an energetic toss of her head.

"Come, now, it isn't you who is putting up this five thousand dollars in the bank?"

"Well, no," he answered, slowly, as though he was busy taking time to think and frame his answer.

"And this trip, so carefully planned out, wasn't your idea, although you did vaguely state that you would like to have me go to Brazil?"

"I suppose I must plead guilty to the soft impeachment," the Jew answered, with a grin.

"The gentleman who keeps in the background—my silent partner—who finds the money—is responsible for the scheme."

"I thought so!"

"And now, for Heaven's sake! don't ask me to tell you who he is, for it really doesn't mat-

ter a brass button to you, and, as far as that goes, what do you care what his reasons are for wishing you to make the trip? These people here will talk badly about you anyway, so why should you care for their chatter?"

"Very true."

"The engagement is a good one!"

"Yes."

"Accept it then; take the money and never mind the why and wherefore of the trip!"

"I will!" exclaimed Miss Delaro, abruptly, and she extended her hand to the speculator in token of compliance and he eagerly grasped it.

"I'll hurry off to town immediately and make all the arrangements," the speculator remarked, as he rose from the chair.

"And you, on your part, get ready and start as soon as possible. My address in New York is the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and you can telephone me if you get into the city before I arrive at the depot."

She said she would, and then the two parted.

"Of course I understand," she murmured, after the Jew had gone.

"There is danger ahead for some one, and it is necessary I should be out of the way. I know too much!"

"Well, what does it matter? I will go and take my hundred dollars a week, and these people here can fight it out among them as best they can."

And she immediately proceeded to pack her trunks.

The inquest was held, but all the testimony brought forward has already been given to the reader; in fact, more, for Miss Delaro did not volunteer information in regard to Adrienne De Courcy's secret visit to the deceased.

She was not asked any questions leading to it, and so did not reveal what she knew.

The verdict was:

"Death by the hand of an unknown murderer."

After the verdict was rendered Miss Delaro asked Justice Palmer if there were any objections to her taking her departure for the city.

"Not the slightest," he answered. "No suspicion attaches itself to you."

Three hours later she was on the deck of the South American steamer, under full headway down New York Bay.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE STRANGER FROM THE WEST.

THE fact that Miss Dickie Delaro had left the United States for foreign parts did not become public property, for the affair was managed so quietly that no news of it got out, and all who knew of her abrupt departure for the city supposed she was somewhere in New York.

Now then we will let old Father Time move the wheels of his chariot for a fortnight ahead, and then again take up the thread of our story.

Matters though had remained about as they were.

The body of the murdered man had been committed to the grave, and the public officers had taken charge of his estate.

There wasn't much of anything to take care of though, for when the funeral expenses were paid, about all that remained was the real estate, and that was covered by the mortgage held by Benoni Wellraven.

No fresh clues had been discovered in regard to the murder, and the mystery of the missing girl too was as deep a mystery as in the beginning.

Uncle Sun-Up had worked like a beaver on both cases, but almost without results.

The abrupt disappearance of Miss Dickie Delaro he regarded as a misfortune, and had gone to work in the most energetic manner to discover what had become of her.

In this enterprise he was more successful than in the others, for he succeeded in tracing the woman to the steamer—he found the backman who had transported the lady and her trunks—and from the passenger-agents of the line he learned that the lady had indeed sailed for Rio.

"That is a check to me—check to my king," he muttered.

"And if I ain't greatly mistaken the move was made by Benoni Wellraven."

"I told him what the witness could testify to and he guessed who it was, and seeing how important her evidence might be if I had the luck to turn up something else in the same line, made haste to get her off to such a distance that it would be a difficult matter to get at her."

"The first trick is his, but whether he will be able to take a second is a question."

"I s'pose most people would think I was foolish to expose my hand to him; they would reason that I ought to have kept what the Delaro woman had told me about the gal to myself."

"But then, by letting out that, I forced his hand; he had to show his cards, and now I have an idee in regard to his game."

"He don't want the missing gal found, for he has sent her away himself, and she either committed the murder, or knows who did."

"If Benoni had any reason to want Ben Wellington out of the way I would jump mighty

quickly to the conclusion that he was the man who did the job, for he is quite capable of such a thing.

"That is, he could plan it, but I doubt if he has the nerve to execute the work, for he seems to be all 'broke up.'"

"Something is preying on his conscience, or worrying him in some way, for he ain't the man he ought to be at his age."

"Both his father and uncle were hale, hearty men when they were older than he is, but this fellow is nothing but a shadow."

"By Jinks! I never thought of that!" he exclaimed, abruptly, as a sudden idea flashed into his mind.

"Mebbe the gal is in the house somewhar!"

"Mebbe she never left Sound View Grange, and that is the reason why it ain't possible to get on her track, no way you kin fix it!"

"Bi-gosh! I must contrive to git into that 'air mansion some way and see if I can smell the thing out."

After waiting for about two weeks Uncle Sun-Up called upon Wellraven and reported that he had done his best, but was unable to find any clew to the girl.

Then the conversation turned upon the murder of Wellington, and the Western detective, in his innocent way, which was as complete a disguise to mask a man's real feelings as could be assumed, revealed to Wellraven that he had succeeded in discovering what had become of Miss Dickie Delaro.

The master of Sound View Grange listened with the greatest attention, and as if he had not the slightest suspicion in regard to the truth.

When the recital was ended he said:

"What do you think of it?"

"I hardly know what to think."

"It is very suspicious."

"Very!"

"She has fled to Brazil, a country with which we have no extradition laws, so that, if she was discovered to have committed a crime here, she could not be brought back to answer for it."

"Yes; there isn't any doubt about that."

"Doesn't it seem to you as if there must be some cause for her flight?—for, according to all accounts, she is a bold, brilliant woman, possessed of a great amount of talent, and, if report speaks truth, of wonderful courage. Just the kind of woman to plan and execute a crime of this sort."

"That idea came to me when you told me what a certain person in Wellington's house said in regard to my ward being in that mansion on the night of the murder. I guessed it was this woman. That was a skillful device told to direct suspicion from herself."

"She knew that Adrienne had disappeared in a mysterious manner, and she was quick to improve the opportunity and turn it to her own advantage."

Uncle Sun-Up nodded and looked wise, but said nothing.

He was going on the principle of giving a dog rope enough to hang himself.

"You might bear this idea in your mind and, possibly, you may be able to find something to confirm it."

Uncle Sammy said that he would do his best on both mysteries, but he was almost ready to give up beat, as there didn't seem to be anything to go on.

Then he departed, cogitating in his mind how he should gain admittance into the mansion.

And on his part Wellraven smiled in a sarcastic manner after the other had departed.

"I presume this fellow is as smart as the average run of detectives, but both of these cases are certainly beyond his power."

"He has not succeeded in discovering a single clew likely to lead to the unraveling of either of these tangled skeins, and I doubt very much if he ever will be able to achieve success."

"And the rest are all fully as much at sea as he is."

We have neglected to state that during this two weeks which had elapsed some of the New York detectives had visited Mamaroneck, tempted by the liberal reward offered by the millionaire, and also by the offer tardily put forth by the selectmen of the town, spurred to it by the press of public sentiment, offering five hundred dollars reward for the capture of the murderer of Benjamin Wellington.

Some of the gentlemen of the neighborhood too had come together and raised a purse of five hundred dollars to be given to the man who should bring to justice the red-banded assassin.

The community had been profoundly stirred by this horrible crime, and the inhabitants were resolved that no stone must be left unturned to secure the murderer.

The mysterious disappearance of the orphaned ward of the millionaire was almost lost sight of in the presence of the greater tragedy.

The New York detectives had prowled around the neighborhood, asked all sorts of questions, shook their heads and looked extremely wise, but were rather noncommittal.

About all that they could be induced to say was that they had secured "clews," which they were engaged "in working up," and that im-

portant disclosures might be expected at any moment.

And then they hinted darkly about some mysterious tramp, whom they professed to have discovered to have been lurking in the neighborhood at the time of the murder.

But as all the lower part of Westchester county is infested with these wandering vagabonds, and it is "a cold day" when ten or a dozen cannot be encountered in a couple of miles' walk along the New Haven railroad, their statement did not make any particular impression upon the community at large.

For years Westchester county—particularly the part adjacent to the New Haven and the Harlem railroads—has been a perfect paradise for tramps.

Along the line of the iron roads the country is thickly settled, and there is fine picking to be had, while inland the country is rough and sterile, a rocky, thickly-wooded region, affording plenty of covert for the wandering vagabonds, when they are not on the tramp in search of prey.

Just back of Harrison station there was a regular tramp rendezvous, so it was said.

There were a couple of old and deserted houses up amid the rocks, in about as wild a region as can be found within a thousand miles of the city, and the report was abroad that a colony of tramps, had settled in these lonely houses, and, using them for a headquarters, were levying contributions on the surrounding country.

The farmers, sore over the disappearance of their fat chickens, young pigs, and various portable articles, which they suspected had been taken by the tramps, talked in a vigorous manner about "gitting up a squad fur to clean the vagabonds out!" but it was the old story of "belling the cat" over again.

There were plenty of men to tell what ought to be done, but none of them appeared disposed to go into the matter and act as a leader for the rest.

But to return to the New York bloodhounds. The community was not deceived by the mysterious talk of the detectives.

They had heard such "ambiguous givings out" before.

No matter what the case was, big or little, the sleuth-hounds of the law always pretended to have clews—they are always "following them up," and the statement that "important results may be expected at any moment," is as old as the hills.

To use the vulgate, the "gag" was entirely too ancient to deceive the public.

They had heard such talk too often to place any reliance in it.

The tramp business was "played out." Such was the common declaration.

The detectives had not secured any clews, but were all at sea in the matter, and the public were strong in the belief that the mystery of the horrible murder of the master of Castle Point would never be solved.

Suspicion really pointed more strongly to Miss Delaro than to any one else, although no one could say that there was a particle of proof implicating her in the bloody deed, excepting the fact of her abrupt departure; but public opinion is a strange thing sometimes, very dogged and extremely unreasonable.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STRANGER.

It was on the evening of the same day that the interview between Benoni Wellraven and the jolly Western detective had taken place, as related in our last chapter, that a strange gentleman made his appearance at the gates of Sound View Grange and requested the pleasure of seeing the master of the mansion.

"A stranger?" questioned Wellraven, when the intelligence was conveyed to him.

"Yis, sor," answered the Irish servant who had carried the message.

"Shure, I knew it was a stranger by the token that he didn't know whether he had got to the right place or not, for he axed me whin he kem up to the gates if this was Sound View Grange and did Mister Benoni Wellraven be afther living here."

"And whin I tould him that he had come to the right place, he axed could he be afther seeing you."

As a rule the millionaire was not a man whom it was easy for strangers to approach.

Like all extremely rich men he was overrun with applications for aid from all sorts of people, who reasoned that out of his abundance he could easily spare a trifle without ever feeling it.

Then, too, all sorts of inventors, with all sorts of schemes, and a host of people, both male and female, who were not inventors, but had devised various plans for making money in a thousand different ways, were anxious to get the assistance of the millionaire to "float" their enterprises.

On this account every stranger who attempted to reach Wellraven's presence was subjected to a rigid cross-examination, and the Irishman who kept the gate had grown so expert at this sort of thing that it was commonly believed he could detect one of these suitors for aid as far

as he could see him, but the millionaire on this occasion understood from the way in which the Irishman spoke that the stranger had made a favorable impression upon him.

"Do you think the man really has business of importance?"

"Yis, sor; shure he's none of the common trash, but a gintleman, out and out!"

"He's a tall, well-made man, wid black hair and a full black beard, and his face is that brown that he might be taken for a nager, if ye couldn't be afther seeing with half an eye that he wasn't."

"He said he would like to have the pleasure of seeing yees on particular business, and whin I axed him for his name he said that it wouldn't be of any use to sind it in, for you would not be apt to remember him, although he had known yees long ago whin yees was a clerk in your father's store."

A shade came over Wellraven's face and a strange look came in his eyes.

Who was this man, rising out of the dim, dark past—rising from the shadows which haunted his life?

At all events he must see him, for his curiosity was now excited, and though he had a morbid apprehension that the coming of the stranger meant no good to him, yet, if there was danger to be met, the sooner it was encountered the better.

So he directed the Irishman to introduce the applicant for admission.

Wellraven took a seat in the reception-room, close to an electric bell which communicated with a gong so that a single light pressure of the finger upon the electric button would immediately alarm the house.

The Irishman soon returned, conducting the gentleman whom he had described.

When he beheld the stranger, the millionaire did not wonder that the man had made an impression upon the servant, for there was a certain something about him which plainly showed he was no common man.

As the Irishman had said, he was almost as dark in the face as a negro, but his countenance was purely Anglo-Saxon and there was nothing foreign-looking about him excepting the color of the skin.

"Mr. Wellraven?" asked the stranger, in a deep, musical, well-modulated voice, as he entered the room.

"At your service, sir," replied the millionaire.

And then as he surveyed the other the thought came to him that the man was no stranger to him.

Away back in the dim past—that past so full of heavy, ominous shadows—he had seen such a face before, and yet, now that he pondered over the circumstance and strove to recall when and where he had seen the man, he was unable to fix the time and place.

This perplexed and annoyed Wellraven, for his memory in all such cases was, as a general thing, extraordinarily good.

This puzzle did not betray itself in his manner, though, and he courteously waved his visitor to a chair.

"I trust you will excuse the liberty I have taken in calling upon you," said the stranger, "but the urgency of my business must be my excuse."

"I am in search of certain information, and you, I believe, are the only person who can give it to me."

This was rather a strange beginning, and Wellraven immediately fell to speculating in regard to what the information could possibly be.

"I shall be happy to oblige you if it is in my power," he replied, his pale, impassive face giving no indication of the apprehension of coming evil which had taken possession of him.

"I will not trespass upon your kindness for many minutes, for in a few words you can tell me all I wish to know."

"I shall be pleased to do so if it is in my power."

"I came to see you in regard to Mrs. Christopher Chadbourne," remarked the stranger, speaking in the most matter-of-fact way, and not showing by his manner that he expected the words would have any particular effect upon his host.

But they did, though.

The blow was delivered so sudden and unexpectedly that it came upon the millionaire with crushing weight.

Yet he nerved himself to meet the ordeal of this interview, for, as we have said, he was prepared to meet unpleasant consequences, for the moment the stranger had entered the room he had an apprehension of mischief.

But, great as the blow was, Wellraven did not betray to any extent how severe the shock had been.

He had leaned back in his chair, his face paled for a moment, and a strange, glassy look came into his eyes.

But, to all outward seeming, his surprise was no more than might be expected from the sudden inquiry in regard to a person who had long ago passed out of his life.

It was with difficulty, though, that the mil-

lionaire spoke, though it was not evident, but it was only by a violent effort that he could force his tongue to do its office.

Then he only gave utterance to the name.

"Mrs. Christopher Chadbourne?" he said, in a tone of question.

"Yes; I am desirous of finding her."

"I—I do not think you will be able to satisfy that desire," Wellraven remarked, speaking slowly, as though he was deliberating over every word.

"Is it possible?"

"Were you not aware that she is dead?"

"Dead? Oh, no!"

And the man spoke with such an air of conviction that Wellraven was amazed.

"Oh, but she is, and has been dead for years."

"Haven't you made some mistake about the matter?" the stranger asked, and he fixed his keen eyes full on the face of the millionaire.

And as Wellraven looked into the deep and earnest eyes, the conviction that the man was no stranger to him, but some old-time acquaintance, strengthened.

"Oh, no, no mistake; the lady died about twenty years ago."

"Let me see," remarked the other in a reflective sort of way.

"That was just about two years after her husband was sent to prison, and about one year after he was killed while attempting to escape from Sing Sing."

The stranger spoke in a brisk, business-like way, like one who had studied a lesson, and Wellraven, quick to jump to conclusions, formed the opinion that of his own knowledge the man knew nothing of the affair, and yet as the millionaire was sure he was no stranger, but had a place in the past at just about the time when these events were occurring, he ought to have known something of them.

"Yes, the dates you give are correct, I believe. It is a long time ago, and I am not so sure about it as I might be."

And the millionaire spoke in a languid sort of way, as much as to say:

"What on earth do you suppose I care about the matter, and why do you come and trouble me in regard to it?"

"There is some mistake about the matter, somewhere," the man remarked in a decided way.

"And, by the by, that reminds me I have not inquired about the child—there was a child?" and the stranger put the question as though he was not sure in regard to this point.

"Yes—there was a child, and it died about the same time as the mother—a day or two before, I think, if I remember aright."

"But, as I told you, I have never charged my memory with the details of this affair. I took but little interest in the mother at the time, and decidedly less afterward, so it is hardly to be expected that all the little details should remain in my memory."

"But how was it that some three years after the time when Mrs. Christopher Chadbourne was reputed to have died, the woman was living under an assumed name at Savannah?"

This second blow was fully as unexpected as the first, but as from the manner of his visitor, Wellraven had expected that something unpleasant was likely to come at any moment, he was, in a measure, prepared for the attack.

"I really cannot undertake to attempt to explain the circumstance, except to say that I think you have been misinformed, or else I have never known the truth about the matter, for it was reported that Mrs. Chadbourne and her child died in this city and at the time that I told you, and if the report is false I cannot understand why it was ever put into circulation."

"I think I can explain that," the other observed, quietly.

"It was done to hoodwink a gentleman about my size."

"I was in the West at the time. Chris Chadbourne had once done me a service, and when I heard that he had got into trouble, and then had been killed in attempting to escape from prison, I made up my mind to do what I could for the wife and child, thrown helpless upon the world."

"I wrote from my Western home, offering assistance, and in reply a letter came from a man named John Basil, who was a cousin, or something of that sort, of Christopher Chadbourne."

"He told the tale of how the wife and child were both sick and not expected to live, then more letters followed, and in the last the story of the death of the mother and child were rehearsed, and a death-notice clipped from some newspaper was sent me."

"Supposing the report to be true, for, of course, I hadn't the least suspicion that there was anything wrong about it, I paid no more attention to the matter."

"But now, after all these years have passed, I find myself in New York, and, to my astonishment, discover that there isn't a word of truth in the story of their deaths."

"Neither mother nor child died at the time when they were supposed to have died, but

were alive years afterward, and are probably alive now."

"This is why I have waited upon you. I have been informed you could probably tell me where I can find the lady, if you choose so to do."

Wellraven laid back in his chair and indulged in a quiet smile.

All his alarm was gone now—that is, in regard to the stranger's quest, although he was still puzzled to place the man and decide what part he had played in the shadowy past.

He felt sure he knew whose hands had forged those bolts which the stranger had flung at him, and knowing that, he could afford to laugh.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PRESSED HOME.

"YOU have been informed that I could give you this information?" the millionaire remarked, after quite a pause, during which he had been thinking over the matter and deciding how to parry the vicious attack.

"Yes."

"May I ask the name of your informant?"

"What does that matter? It seems to me that the question is not who told me, but is the statement correct?"

"Well, that question is easily answered. It isn't!" Wellraven replied, decidedly.

"Not correct?"

"No, not in a single particular."

"And now I will tell you who told you this miserable fabrication."

"It was this same John Basil of whom you spoke; now reduced to the condition of a miserable, broken-down wreck—a perfect tramp."

"In years gone by I helped the fellow—aided him, until the conviction dawned upon me that it was merely a waste of money to give it to such a miserable wretch. And now, as a reward for my bounty, he has turned and tried to sting the hand which fed him."

"Then there isn't any truth in his story?"

"Not a particle!"

"And Mrs. Christopher Chadbourne died in New York about a year after her husband was killed?"

"Not the slightest doubt of it."

"Would you mind my cross-examining you a little bit on this point?" asked the stranger, with a strange, quizzical smile that the millionaire did not like the looks of.

"Well, the proceeding is not what is to be expected from a stranger in the house of his host; still, as I have nothing to conceal in regard to the matter—in fact, do not take any interest in it in any way, you are welcome to go ahead."

"Thank you; I assure you I appreciate the kindness."

This was polite enough; but the millionaire felt assured that it was but mere lip-service—there wasn't any sincerity about it.

It was the same as the hand-shake of the pugilists before they begin to batter each other.

"Now in regard to this death, do you know of your own knowledge that the woman *did* die?"

"Were you present at the time when the vital spark fled?"

The suspicion immediately flashed upon Wellraven that the stranger was laying some kind of a trap for him and he must be careful or he would get caught.

So he was on his guard when he answered, although, apparently, he spoke in the frankest manner.

Wellraven's idea had been from the beginning to impress the man with the idea that he hadn't anything to conceal and that he was quite willing to give him all the information in his power.

He shrewdly judged that this would be a better way of proceeding in the matter than to attempt to "ride the high horse" and stand upon his dignity.

If he could succeed in convincing this eager searcher after knowledge that he knew nothing about the affair, it would of course end the matter.

The man would go away satisfied and he would hear no more of him.

"No, I was not present."

"Were you at the funeral, then?"

"That I do not really remember; it is a good many years ago, you know, and one's memory is apt to be treacherous in regard to unimportant matters."

"My impression is, though, that I was not."

"Then, as far as your knowledge goes, you could not swear to the fact of her death?"

"No, except from hearsay and belief. In my own mind there isn't a doubt in regard to the matter."

"I presume you read the death notices in the newspapers?"

"Oh, yes, I presume I did."

"There were death notices, of course?"

"I certainly presume so," the millionaire replied, with a look of surprise upon his face, as though he could not understand why any one should have a doubt about it.

"Yes, there ought to have been death notices if the woman really died," the stranger observed, in a musing sort of way.

"A notice was sent to me in the West."

"That is a sure proof, then, that there were notices published."

"Yes, it ought to be proof, but it isn't, for I think that the notice which was sent to me was a forgery skillfully gotten up for the occasion, and with the express purpose of making me believe that Mrs. Chadbourne was dead."

"I have searched the files of every city newspaper which was published at the time, and in not a single one of them can I find any notice of the death."

"The death notice sent me, which I fortunately preserved, I have submitted to practical printers and they all agree that it is not a newspaper clipping but a slip got up to resemble a clipping."

"Another point: I have consulted the books of every cemetery adjacent to the city, and in none of them can I discover any record of the burial of Mrs. Christopher Chadbourne."

A look akin to that which comes into the eyes of the hunted animal shone in the orbs of the millionaire as he listened to the record of the persistent search which the stranger had made.

Here was a man who, apparently, was far better fitted for the life of a detective than the dull-heads who had been making themselves conspicuous in the neighborhood during the past few days.

And this man the drunken wretch of a Basil had set upon him.

Not that either of the two was likely to profit much by the operation, still it was not pleasant, but Wellraven was glad that he yielded to the stranger's desire for an interview, for now he knew the exact danger which threatened and could prepare to meet it.

"Well, it seems to me that you have made quite an exhaustive search," Wellraven remarked, slowly, and with a wearied air as though the subject bored him.

"Now, since the first part of this Basil's story I have proven to be truth, have I not reason to believe that the rest may also be credible?"

"Oh, that doesn't follow. Still I do not know anything about the matter and do not take any interest in it."

"The last time the fellow was here he made wild threats of what he was going to do if I did not aid him. It was a case of blackmail pure and simple, and I told the wretch that if he dared to come here again I would have him put where he would not be able to trouble any one."

"Then you are aware of the charges he brings against you?"

"No, I didn't pay any attention to the fellow's vaporings, and I hope it is not possible that a sensible man, as you certainly appear to be, would give any heed to the ravings of this lunatic!"

"Possibly it is as well though that you should know the extent of the fellow's charges."

"Oh, no; I do not take the least bit of interest in the subject."

"What can it possibly matter to me what he says or does? Only if I find he shows any disposition to annoy me I will have him locked up where he will not be allowed quite so much liberty."

The stranger understood that this was a threat aimed not only at the unfortunate wreck of a Basil, but at himself as well; but he did not allow the millionaire to perceive he understood the full extent of the covert speech, and answered in the most innocent manner possible:

"I certainly would advise you to take some measure to put a curb on the fellow's tongue."

"Of course he is only a drunken wretch, hardly worthy the notice of a decent man, much less a gentleman of your standing in the world."

"Bah!" cried Wellraven, in supreme contempt, "there are always plenty of such rabble to bark like curs at the heels of their betters."

"This Basil is extremely malicious in his speech, and I must do the fellow the justice to say that he has the wit to put together and relate a plausible tale."

"I must confess that the recital staggered me, and although I am well acquainted with all the circumstances of the case, I was puzzled to detect the falsehood from the truth."

The millionaire bestowed a keen look upon the speaker when he stated he was familiar with the particulars, and the question naturally rose in his mind how was it that such could be the case.

But before he could put the question, the stranger went on in his speech:

"He made no bones of charging you with the blackest of crimes; he declares that you hated Christopher Chadbourne because he was lucky enough to win the hand of pretty Margaret Chetwood."

"She, woman-like, was idiot enough to prefer the poor clerk to the prospective rich man, but you did not blame her, only your successful rival, and you conspired with a certain Benjamin Wellington—now dead—to ruin him."

"Really his knowledge is wonderful," remarked the millionaire, sarcastically, as the other paused for a moment.

"Yes, really miraculous, considering that he could not possibly know anything of the matter even if such a thing ever happened."

"The plot succeeded; Chris. Chadbourne was

sent to Sing Sing, and was there killed in attempting to escape.

"The widow fell sick; you, through Basil, advanced the money to take care of her. Then, when I wrote from the West, by your orders, Basil told the false tale of the death of the woman, and so threw me off the track."

"Then you took her to Savannah and there secretly married her."

"When your father died and you returned to New York, you caused a second false report of her death to be circulated; this to throw Basil off the track and keep him from blackmailing you."

"But she still lived, for Basil saw her in the city with his own eyes after that."

"This is his story, and this is what has sent me to ask where is the woman now."

"It is all a lie!" exclaimed Wellraven, indignantly.

"If I married the woman and she is still alive, how comes it that I dared to marry a second time?"

"My marriage with Miss Rita De Courcy was an open one, and if I had had another wife, she would have been more an angel than a woman if she had not kicked up a row about it."

"The story is absurd, and I can't understand how you could give heed to it for an instant."

"Drowning men clutch at straws, and in my desire to ascertain the fate of the wife and child of my dead friend, I listened even to the tale of this outcast. But I will not detain you longer, and I am much obliged for the courtesy of this interview."

And then the stranger bowed himself out.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DARK SUSPICION.

WELLRAVEN remained motionless for a moment, staring down the entry at the retreating form of the stranger with wondering eyes.

He had risen from his feet when his visitor manifested an intention of withdrawing, and had accompanied him to the door.

"Who is this man?" he muttered as he pressed his hand against his heart, as though he felt a throbbing pain there.

"Who is this man, and what evil demon sent him into my path?"

"He is dangerous. More dangerous than any man I have ever encountered in my way through the world."

"I must know more of him."

At that moment the young quadroom waiter, who had been, since he was a boy, in the service of Wellraven, happened to come into the entry.

He was a quick-witted young fellow, almost as white as though there was not a drop of negro blood in his veins, and the idea flashed upon the master of Sound View Grange that he was just the one he needed in such an emergency as this.

Wellraven beckoned to him, and the boy hurried forward, eager to be of service to the gentleman who was such a liberal paymaster.

The stranger at this moment was being ushered through the front door by the servant there in charge.

"Hannibal, I want you to follow that man, who has just gone out—follow him wherever he goes, even if it is to the city."

"Find out his name and business—in fine, all the particulars you can about him, but be careful not to allow him to perceive that he is watched."

"Yes, sah," replied the quadroom, with a grin which displayed all his teeth, for he was delighted with this proof of his master's confidence, and then such a task as this was exactly to his liking, for the fellow was naturally of a snaky disposition.

"Here's money for your expenses," and Wellraven placed four five-dollar notes in his hand.

"Don't ye be afeard, sah, I'll do de job right up to de handle."

And then, hastening to procure his hat, he began the pursuit, while the master of the house withdrew to the solitude of his apartment, to meditate upon this unexpected danger which was apparently threatening him.

The stranger passed through the grounds, the porter opened the gate so he could go out, and he took the road leading to the north, the one which would bring him to the village.

"The campaign has opened," he murmured, as he walked briskly along, communing with himself after the fashion of men who have spent much time in solitary places, where, for want of other companions, they were forced to content themselves with the sound of their own voice.

"Wellraven understands that he is exposed to an attack, and he is not the man I take him to be if he does not strive to get in the first blow."

"If he is an innocent man, he will not—he will remain passive, but if this tale that Basil has told is true—and I haven't the least doubt that it is—then, most surely, I must be on the lookout, for my gentleman will try to get a crack at me if he can."

"But what a terrible mixed up case it is!"

"Is Margaret Chadbourn or her child alive?—And if the woman is, how comes it that she al-

lowed Wellraven to marry again after he had wedded her? And that he did marry her I am certain, for she was too pure and good a woman to become his victim."

"How it must have puzzled this spider-like villain to-night when I told the story of his ancient crime. No wonder he was astounded that such a tale should come from the lips of Basil, who, being an outsider, of course knew nothing of the affairs of the office."

"But so far he can afford to laugh at me for I have not yet found the place wherein I can put my lever which is intended to topple the villain to the earth."

The stranger walked on briskly for a good ten minutes, his mind busy with the abstruse problem which he had set out to solve, and then the idea which had before occurred to him suggested itself to his mind.

"If he is the guilty man that I take him to be he will be sure to have me followed to-night in order to ascertain what I am up to."

"That is, if there happens to be any tool handy whom he can set at the task."

"And there never was a man of this kind yet who was at a loss for human instruments to do his dirty work."

"But I must not be followed, for that would interfere materially with my schemes; so I must lay a little trap and see if I can't catch something in it."

The speaker had been striding onward with long and vigorous steps, and the sound of the footfalls resounded sharp and clear on the still evening air.

He was passing over an open space, the moon was just coming up, so as to make the surrounding objects visible, and his muscular figure could easily be distinguished for many hundred yards.

But now that he had made up his mind to entrap the spy, if there was one following on his track, he changed his tactics.

He shortened his stride, and took slower steps; in fact, began to saunter along as though he wasn't in any particular hurry.

The result of this was that the noise made by his footfalls immediately decreased and could not be distinguished over a hundred feet away.

And as any spy, following cautiously in the rear, would be obliged, in order not to be seen, to keep at a much greater distance away, the sound of the footsteps would be no assistance in determining the whereabouts of the man upon whom the watch was set.

Leaving the stranger to pursue his way, we will note the actions of the quadroom spy, following upon the heels of the other with all the perseverance of a bloodhound, and with decidedly more cunning.

As long as the stranger strode along in his vigorous way the spy had an easy task of it, but when he slackened his pace, and the noise of the footsteps could no longer be taken for a guide, the task became a difficult one.

The spy must be careful to keep so far in the rear as not to lead the man whose footsteps were dogged to suspect that he was being followed, and yet the watcher must not keep so far away as to allow his game to escape by turning some corner.

The quadroom stole along with steps as noiseless as those of a velvet-footed dog, and he took advantage of every bit of concealment that the way offered.

One thought gave him a great deal of confidence, and that was that the stranger could not possibly suspect that a watcher was on his track, and so be cautious in regard to how he went on.

About half the distance between Orienta and the post-road had been traversed when the quadroom received as great a surprise as he ever experienced in his life.

He was passing through a part of the road where the trees were few and far between, and as he had quickened his pace a little so as not to fall too far behind the man he was tracking, he was using extra caution for fear of "over running" the game.

Hannibal was skulking along, peering before him, anxious to ascertain the whereabouts of the stranger, betraying in the plainest possible way that he was playing the spy upon some one, when a short and sudden command abruptly brought him to a standstill and his heart up into his mouth.

The word came from a clump of bushes by the roadside, not over ten feet from where the quadroom stood, and it was accompanied by a sharp click, like the sound which is given out by the hammer of a pistol being raised.

Hannibal glared in the direction of the sound. On the further side of the clump of bushes sat the stranger, right in full view, now that the attention of the spy was directed to him, and the moonbeams played upon the nickel plated barrel of a revolver which he held in his hand.

He had the weapon leveled, Hannibal could see that the hammer was up, and his knees shook when he realized that he had fallen into a trap.

It was no wonder he halted at the command as suddenly as though he had been turned into stone.

"Good boy! mind your p's and q's!" remarked the man with the revolver, approvingly.

"That is the way I like to see a man act. Now come up here, sit down and make yourself comfortable."

The spy obeyed, his teeth almost chattering with terror, for the quadroom was an arrant coward; a fellow without a single bit of courage in him.

"Let me see; your face is familiar to me; you are attached to Sound View Grange. You were at the gate to-night when I went in, and I saw you in the hall when I came out."

"Yes, sah," stammered the quadroom, showing the whites of his eyes in his fright.

"And who set you to play the spy on me?"

"No—nobody, sah."

"Oh, come! that story will not do!" the other exclaimed, sternly.

"You didn't go into this thing for fun, and you know it. And you mustn't attempt to lie to me or I shall be obliged to drill a hole right through you."

"For hebbin sake, good gemmen, don't do dat 'ar; I'll tell you de truth—de bressed truth, I sw'ar I will!" the quadroom protested.

"That is what I want, and mind you, my young friend, I will not give you away, either."

"When you return to the man who sent you, it will be easy to tell some cock-and-bull story about how I managed to give you the slip in the darkness, and I will never contradict it."

As long as he was discovered, the quadroom didn't see what harm there would be in telling the truth; for, as the stranger said, he was not obliged to confess the truth to his master, and if he had to lie he would rather do it without having his life in danger if the trick was discovered.

So he made a full confession.

Of course there wasn't much to confess, only that his master had sent him to play the spy, with instructions to find out all he could.

"Well, now, you must return and say that you tracked me to the post-road and there lost me, for a carriage was in waiting at that point into which I got and was driven off."

This was a reasonable explanation, and the quadroom grasped eagerly at it.

"And the carriage went south toward Larchmont."

The quadroom nodded.

"Now make yourself scarce!"

Hannibal did not wait for a second bidding, but fled in haste, while the stranger continued on his way toward Mamaroneck.

CHAPTER XXV.

SEEKING THE TRUTH.

WHEN the quadroom returned to the mansion he told the tale to his master exactly as he had been bidden by the stranger, and Wellraven, who had not the least reason to doubt, believed it was the truth.

Meanwhile the dark suspicion which had haunted his mind was getting stronger and stronger.

"There is but one man who could possess the knowledge that the stranger has—there is but one man who would have entered upon this task with the ferocious zeal which this bloodhound displays."

"Strange if the dark apprehension which has haunted my life for the last twenty years should come true at last."

"To-morrow I will make a determined attempt to solve the mystery."

And the master of Sound View Grange was as good as his word.

One of the early morning trains conveyed him to New York, and there he astonished his lawyer by calling upon that gentleman just after he had got out of bed.

Wellraven's legal adviser was one of the leading men in the city, a great politician, who, if anything, had been more successful in guiding the counsels of one of the "Halls" which rule the metropolis, than at the bar, although his practice was reputed to be as valuable a one as there was in the city.

When Wellraven made known his business in New York the lawyer was surprised.

"You want to go up and make a thorough inspection of Sing Sing Prison? What a deuced odd idea!"

"Yes, it is a whim of mine," Wellraven explained.

"Men like myself with plenty of money and nothing to do, often find the time to hang heavy on our hands."

"I don't doubt you will find the thing well worth a visit, but in order to do the prison thoroughly you must be introduced to the keeper by some man who has a big pull in politics, for kissing goes by favor, you know, and if you want extra attention you must show you are worthy of it."

"I thought you would be just the man to put me through."

"No, not just at this precise moment; my wing of the party got cleaned out at the last election, and so I am not in so high a feather as I was."

"But I can introduce you to a man to whom the warden of Sing Sing is indebted for a great many favors, and a letter from him will put you through."

The lawyer accomplished this easily enough, and the eleven o'clock train on the Hudson

River Railway carried the millionaire northward to the little town where one of the most renowned prisons in the world is located.

The letter acted like a charm, and the warden expressed himself as delighted at the opportunity to oblige a friend of General Blank.

The tour of inspection was duly made, and after it was ended the warden invited his distinguished visitor to join him at luncheon.

It was not every day that the warden got hold of a millionaire, and he was disposed to make much of the circumstance.

While at lunch Wellraven made mention of the fact that some twenty odd years ago a clerk who occupied a desk right by his side had been unfortunate enough to fall into bad ways, and his career was wound up by a trip to Sing Sing.

"The man's name was Christopher Chadbourne."

"Oh, yes, Jolly Chris as we used to call him," the warden exclaimed.

"I was an under-keeper then, and had charge of the gang in which he was."

"Let me see, he died here in prison, I believe?"

"Yes, he was shot while endeavoring to escape. I remember the circumstance perfectly well, for I was one of the first men to give the alarm."

"There was a gang at work on the same dock, six or eight men, under the charge of a keeper."

"Suddenly one of the fellows hit him in the head with a rock, and then they all went headlong into the water."

"It was a put-up job, you see, all arranged beforehand. It was late in the day and the fools fancied they could get away."

"The game was to slay the keeper with a rock and then take to the river."

"I see, a desperate venture."

"Yes, but men will take such risks, you know. This stone dock was in an isolated place then, and they calculated that after they laid the keeper out they would be able to slip into the water and get a good start before they were discovered."

"But it didn't work that way, eh?"

"Oh, no, not at all."

"The moment he got the clump in the head the keeper yelled for assistance."

"The fellow that was to do the slugging act hadn't calculated correctly in regard to the thickness of the keeper's skull."

"And the moment the alarm was given, the guard hastened to the spot and threatened to fire on the men if they didn't come back."

"Quite exciting."

"You bet! Well, all surrendered but three, and begged for mercy."

"And one of the three was Chadbourne?"

"Yes; every man-Jack of them was a splendid swimmer, and as the tide was running out like a mill-race, I s'pose they calculated there was a chance for them by diving to escape the bullets."

"The attempt was not a success, though?"

"No, sir; the guards were all good marksmen, and after warning the convicts they opened fire."

"They knew they had such a sure thing of it that they took the trouble to warn the men instead of opening fire on them immediately."

"And were all three killed?"

"All three, although they dived and did their level best to escape the bullets."

"And what did you do with the bodies? Is there a graveyard attached to the prison?"

"The bodies!" exclaimed the warden. "Bless you, we never troubled our heads about them!"

"In the first place, as I told you, the tide was running out with wonderful swiftness."

"Then some of the rest of the convicts, excited by the firing, showed signs of making trouble, so we had all we could do to preserve order and get the men locked up in their cells, without going to the trouble of getting out a boat to recover a lot of useless dead men."

"The bodies were found, I suppose?" Wellraven remarked, carelessly, as though he were talking merely for pastime, and keeping his self-composure wonderfully, although the cold chills were running up and down his back.

"I don't really remember," replied the prison official, indifferently, as though it was a small matter anyway.

"It appears to me, now that I recall the circumstance, that a couple of the bodies were found—but no, I am wrong! There was only one that we in the prison here knew anything about."

"And the rest were never recovered?"

"No, they probably floated down the river and out to sea."

"But it seems to me that if you did not recover the bodies you couldn't be sure that the men were dead."

The warden laughed.

"You wouldn't say that if you had seen the affair as I did."

"Why, there wasn't a man of them who wasn't regularly riddled by the balls. The water around was fairly turned red with their blood."

"Yet you have received these terrible wounds and lived to tell of it, you know."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly; there isn't any mistake about that. But in this case you would be safe in betting all you are worth that not one of the three escaped."

"I tell you it was a regular butchery! I never felt so sorry for men in my life as I did for those poor devils, but they would have it; they brought it upon themselves."

"I was thinking that if Chadbourne's body was the one which was recovered that I should like to look at the grave of the unfortunate fellow, just for the sake of old times."

"No, Chadbourne's body was not recovered. I am quite sure of that, because it was remarked at the time what an unlucky fellow he was," the warden replied in the most positive manner.

"He was the only one of the men on the dock who was not engaged in the plot to disable the keeper so that an escape could be effected."

"The rest of the gang didn't trust him, for he was too 'soft,' to use their slang."

"That is, he always tried to behave himself, obey the rules and give as little trouble as possible, and for that reason the others—who were hard nuts, every one—were afraid he would give the snap away to the keepers if they allowed him to know what they intended to do."

Wellraven nodded; this was honest Chris Chadbourne to the life.

"But when he saw the rest leap into the water after disabling the guard the temptation was too much for him."

"He thought he saw a chance for liberty and he went for it, to meet a grave beneath the waters."

At this point Wellraven changed the subject. He had learned all that he wished.

Shortly afterward he was in the train again on his homeward way.

"It is as I suspected!" he cried. "The man did not die—he escaped and I must now prepare to meet the storm which my rash acts in the old time aroused."

"The struggle is to the death; I gave no mercy, and therefore can expect none."

For all his millions Wellraven was a terribly unhappy man.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TRAMPS' RETREAT.

A FEW miles north of Harrison Station on the New Haven road is a wild, rocky and desolate region.

As we have said in a previous chapter, the wanderers who combined to make life disagreeable for the peaceable farmers along the line of the sound near the Connecticut border had pitched their camp in this benighted region, and owing to its being in a retired locality had not as yet been troubled by the officers, although the farmers in the neighborhood, smarting under the ravages of the tramps, were calling loudly upon the proper officers to interfere and drive away the horde who, like the locusts of old, had come down to prey upon the land.

It is night when we for the first time introduce the reader to the temporary abiding places of these wanderers, who like the Arabs of the desert are almost constantly on the move.

As there was plenty of wood to be had in the neighborhood for the mere trouble of gathering it, a huge fire blazed in front of the two miserable houses in which the tramps had found shelter.

A half-dozen good-sized lusty fellows, who all looked fit to "tackle" the stoutest job that could be found, instead of leading the most lazy of lives, depending upon charity, unwillingly doled out—half the time under the influence of fear—and what petty thefts came in their way.

One of the party had a dog, a half-starved-looking animal, as disreputable in its appearance as its master.

And this beast was the sentinel for the party.

They were indulging in a general conversation relative to their exploits during the past few days, and were speculating in regard to the prospect for the future.

"If the durned White Plains sheriff don't get arter us, boys, we are all right," one of the gang observed.

"Sheriffs don't amount to much," remarked another.

"This cuss does. He means business when he gits on the war-path, and I tell you what it is, pards, if he gits arter us we'll have to dust."

"We ought to turn our hand to some good job afore we git out of this destrict," suggested a broad-shouldered, beetle-browed chap.

"Mebbe the boss will hatch up something that will put some money in our 'leather,'" remarked still another one of the party, a rather undersized, red-haired ruffian.

These six men were no ordinary tramps who had met by chance, but were a regular organized band under the leadership of a truculent ruffian, known to his companions as Bill, the Teaser.

William Carmine, to give him his right appellation, was a fellow for whom the gates of a half-dozen prisons were yawning.

Contrary to the usual custom among the criminal class, Carmine did not confine himself to any one "specialty."

He could "crack a crib"—rob a house—pick a pocket, garrote some unsuspicious traveler, or descend to petty sneak-thieving with equal skill.

Nothing seemed to be amiss that came to Bill the Teaser's net.

His exploits had made the cities too hot to hold him, and so he had turned tramp, and meeting with a few congenial souls, had organized this band, and a worse gang of scoundrels Westchester county had never seen.

The people of the country-side, of course, had no suspicion of the nature of the gang which had taken up its quarters in their midst, and though many wondered that these tramps seemed to be so much more muscular and resolute than the usual beggarly, footsore wanderers who passed from door to door, yet they little suspected that a regularly organized band of thieves was in their neighborhood.

"Ain't it 'bout time for the captain?" asked the stout fellow, who seemed to be a sort of a lieutenant—a second in command and rather looked up to by the rest.

"Yes pretty near time."

"Where has he gone, anyway?" the other asked. "I was out on the tramp, looking for some likely crib to crack when he went."

"Down to Mamaroneck, to see what the people are talking about. He heard that there was talk of the sheriff gittin' up a crowd for to come and root us out of here, and Bill reckoned he would go down to the town and git some p'int, 'cos we ain't lost any sheriff."

"But he comes from White Plains, don't he?" put in the red-faced, red-haired fellow.

"Yes, but it is the Mamaroneck folks who are kicking. They think we are too good judges of poultry to have in the neighborhood."

"We ought to crack some big cribs so as to make a good raise and then cut our lucky," the big fellow suggested.

At this point the dog pricked up its ears and then began to growl.

"Somebody's coming," exclaimed the red-faced man.

Then they all peered eagerly out into the darkness.

The dog rose to his feet and growled more violently, and then, all of a sudden changing his tone, galloped off into the darkness.

"It's the boss, for sure," the lieutenant exclaimed.

A few moments more and Bill, the Teaser, appeared.

He was a common-looking sort of a man, poorly dressed, and without anything particular about him to excite attention, excepting that he had an extremely repulsive face.

"Make yourselves scarce, boys!" he exclaimed, when he came within the circle of light.

"There'll be a gent along to talk business with me in a few moments, and when he comes yer room will be a durned sight better'n yer company."

The tramps rose with alacrity, for Bill, the Teaser, ruled his men with a rod of iron.

"Does it look as if it was going to be a good lay-out?" the lieutenant asked.

"Oh, yes, the biggest kind of a plant! I reckon it will pan out a hundred a head at the least calculation. But dust out of here and give me a chance for my white alley."

"The man don't want to talk biz with a dozen, you know."

The tramps retired so that the "gentleman" could approach.

As soon as they had vanished into the houses Bill, the Teaser, threw another handful of wood upon the fire, and then made a signal toward the obscurity from which he had come.

Out from the darkness advanced a man, roughly dressed, with a short, brown beard, and shaggy hair.

A soft slouch hat, rather the worse for wear, was pulled down low over his eyes, and he presented the appearance of a man who was rather ashamed of the business in which he was engaged and therefore courted obscurity.

The new-comer had the appearance of a countryman, and was apparently one of the small farmers who contrived to get a fair living out of the rather sterile soil which is the rule in the neighborhood.

When the countryman approached the fire, Bill, the Teaser, pointed in a hospitable way to an old log near the blaze as an invitation to be seated, while he squatted on a rock which cropped out of the earth near by.

"Did you git yer eyes on the boys?" the ruffian asked as the new-comer seated himself.

The new-comer nodded.

"W'ot do you think of 'em—ain't they 'bout w'ot I told yer?"

"Oh, yes, oh, yes, they look like tough nuts."

"Well, now, they are that, and no mistake," the other exclaimed in a tone of admiration.

"I told yer when I run across yer in the town, and you commenced to talk business, that my gang wasn't common tramps."

"You see, to give the snap away, my gang are reg'lar professionals."

"We are jest loafing 'round the country now for the benefit of our health," and at this point the ruffian indulged in a series of significant winks.

"You understand how the old thing works, I reckon."

"The city got too hot to hold us, and so we lit out, but we are no common tramps, and don't you forget it!"

"Oh, I can see that with half an eye," the other remarked.

"If there's any business to be done which requires first-class professional men, we are the chaps to tackle the job."

"Well, this snap which I am going to put you up to requires good men, and there's money in it. I am not acting for myself, you understand, but for a third party who don't want to be mixed up in the affair."

"I understand," and the ruffian nodded, knowingly.

"This hyer party is a big-bug who puts up the ducats and wants the job done, but wants to fix the racket up in such a way that if anything goes wrong they can't fix no blame onto him."

"That is it, exactly."

"Oh, I understand all about it; I have worked jest sich tricks afore. I'm an old hand at the biz, you kin bet your life!"

"I don't s'pose it matters to you who finds the money, or wants the job done, as long as you make your stake out of it?"

"Not a mite. When you say that you hit me exactly where I live!"

"So long as the ducats are put up promptly, according to agreement, it don't matter a cent to me where the 'sugar' comes from."

"And now jest come down to particulars, and lemme know what the racket is. I kinder have an idea, of course, that you want some cuss 'done up.'"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE AGREEMENT.

THE countryman cast a cautious glance around him, and the ruffian, noticing it, understood that he was afraid of being overheard.

"Don't be skeered," Bill, the Teaser, remarked, reassuringly.

"There ain't anybody 'round excepting my gang, and they are all in the houses minding their own business, like gen'lmen."

"You see we are in the middle of quite an open space here, and even if there was anybody a-hiding in the bushes back in the darkness they couldn't make out what we are chinning about, so long as we don't go to howling our business as if we were running a primary meeting."

"Then do you see that 'ere dorg there?" and the ruffian pointed to the disreputable brute stretched out at full length by the fire.

"That animal is one of the best watch-dogs that you kin scare up between here and New York, although mebbe you wouldn't think so to look at him, but handsome is as handsome does, you know!"

"He ain't no beauty, but when it comes to usefulness there ain't no thousand dollars in this world that kin buy a better dorg."

"He didn't seem to mind me when I came up," the countryman remarked, as though he had his doubts in regard to the brute's ability.

"That's only a proof of how smart the animal is," Bill, the Teaser, replied.

"He was a-watching me and see'd me beckon for you to come up to the fire."

"That showed the dorg that it was all right—you were coming on business and he had no call to let you see the size of his teeth, but if you had come up, and I hadn't given no sign that it was all right, he would have gone at you as if he wanted to eat you up."

"So, as I started in to say, if there was anybody hiding in the bushes within a thousand yards from this place the dorg would be onto 'em in a minute."

"It is always well to be sure before you go ahead."

"Oh, yes, there isn't any mistake about that, but it's all right here, and we kin chin all we like without any danger of anybody getting onto what we say."

After this assurance the stranger felt no hesitation in proceeding.

"You have got the thing about right," he admitted.

"There is a man who is in another man's way—"

"And hain't gen'lman enuff for to git out!" interrupted the ruffian.

"Well, all I've got to say is that if I were the man I would either kill the bloke myself or hire it done."

"That is just the programme, just what I want to talk to you about. But we will put it in another way, you know."

"We don't want to talk about killing men 'cos that is ag'in' the law, and I don't propose to run my head into any hangman's noose, if I know myself."

"No more do I!" the ruffian protested.

"But if I take the idee into my head that a certain man ain't healthy and won't be likely to live long that is all right."

"There's no harm in a man having such an idea as that, you know."

"Nary time!"

"And if I should make a bet with you that

the man would live to be six months older, that is all right."

"Cert! bet yer life on it! You have got a perfect right to your opinion and you kin back it up with the solid stuff too, if you feel like it; that hain't anybody's business as far as I kin see!"

"Well, that is my idee."

"Now then, this party that I represent thinks that a certain man will live long, and will be willing to bet you a thousand dollars on it, too."

"That's business and I'm open to take it!" Bill, the Teaser, exclaimed, with a self-satisfying nod.

"No man ever shakes a thousand dollars in my face that I don't take him up as soon as possible, and that is the kind of a hairpin I am!"

"The party will put you up a five hundred in advance—or, better still, you name a party in whom you have confidence, and whom my man will also be willing to trust, and the whole of the money can be put up with the understanding that it is to be paid over when the man dies."

"That is O. K., but I think I ought to have a leetle advance, kinder for expenses, you know, 'cos a few dollars will help to work a racket of this kind right up to the handle."

The countryman thought the matter over for a moment.

"Well, the party will allow you a hundred for expenses, and still put the thousand up."

"You see, you are doing business with a man who don't stand on a few dollars so long as he has his game worked the way he wants it."

"That will do; got the money with you now?"

"Oh, no," replied the other, with a short, dry laugh. "I'm not such a fool as to carry around so big a sum as a hundred dollars with me."

"Now, see here, pard, you hain't got any call to be afeard!" the ruffian protested, in an injured sort of way.

"I'm the squarest kind of a man with my customers. I wouldn't go for to knock you down for a nickel!"

"No, siree! that ain't the kind of man I am! Why, if I knew you had a million of dollars in your pockets I wouldn't go for you."

"No, sir, you kin bet your life onto it. That wouldn't be any way for to do business."

"Oh, I haven't the least fear in regard to that," the other explained; "but I never carry any money around with me. The hundred will be ready for you to-morrow night in the village."

"I will meet you on the bridge—you know, that crosses the river right in the center of the town—the iron bridge—"

"Yes, I know!" the ruffian exclaimed. "The general loafing-place of the town!"

"Exactly; be at the bridge at eight o'clock to-morrow night. I will walk past, and you follow without making any sign that you know me, for fear of attracting attention. I will walk down to the boat dock where the New York propeller lies, and you can join me there."

"It will be a suitable spot for us to transact our business, for it is not often that there is anybody down on the dock after nightfall."

"Oh, yes, it will be a bully place, and now about putting the thousand up."

"Do you know Jimmy Lenniker, the jeweler, in Grand street? I don't s'pose you do, though, 'cos you ain't apt to be acquainted with the city."

"Oh, yes, I am, and I think I know the man you name. I've a cousin who has a store on Grand street. Is this Jimmy Lenniker, the politician?"

"The wery man!"

"I know all about him then; but what of it?"

"Jimmy's the man to hold the money."

"But will he do it?" asked the other, evidently doubtful in regard to this point.

"You can bet all the money that you have got, or ever expect to get, that he will!" the ruffian cried.

"Why, Jimmy is one of the biggest 'fences' in the town."

"A receiver of stolen goods?"

"You bet! and that is where he has made his big money; but he manages things so mighty sharp that the fly-cops never manage to get onto him."

"But if a gent in my line has got a lot of silver or anything of that kind that he wants to get rid of, Jimmy will give a fair price for it, and then the way the boodle will go into the melting-pot, so it can't be identified, is a caution!"

"I see; but I never suspected that there was anything crooked about him."

"He's been on it for the last ten years, and he's got so much money out of the swag that if he gets into any trouble he's always able to hush the thing up. If stolen goods are traced to his shop he always stands ready to square the owner, and when the pigeon gets his money back that is all he cares for."

"Jimmy allers swears, you know, that there was a mistake—some clerk took the boodle in and flung it into the melting-pot without his knowledge."

"I see; a smart trick."

"Oh, yes; he is as smart as they make 'em. Now, Jimmy will hold this money for a commission of about ten per cent., say a hundred dollars on the thousand, and will pay it over when a certain party croaks."

"But can this man be depended upon?"

"Oh, yes, every time! He couldn't do the business with the crooks that he does if he wasn't square."

"I understand, and will arrange the matter through my cousin, who knows Lenniker."

"I s'pose he will suspect that there is something crooked about the business."

"He'll never trouble his head to think about it," the ruffian asserted.

"He's jest old business, every time, and he never troubles his head about his customers' affairs."

"The understanding is that he is to take the money—act as stake-holder and pay the money over when a certain party dies."

"And that is all he wants to know about the affair; and now, who is the man?"

"He is a stranger in the town—"

"Mamaroneck?"

"Yes; and he is staying at the depôt hotel. He calls himself Robert Gridley, and at present is doing a little detective business."

"He's jest the kind of man I like to get after. I hate all these bloodhounds, and I would sooner kill one than eat."

And so the agreement was made between the two—the compact of death.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TEASER REFLECTS.

AS the reader has probably suspected, the Robert Gridley who had taken up his quarters at the depôt hotel was the dark-bearded stranger who had called upon the millionaire at Sound View Grange.

Nearly a month had elapsed since the time of that interview, and during that period the stranger appeared not in the village.

Wellraven took pains to keep himself posted in regard to this, for he kept the quadroom constantly on the watch, and so the moment the stranger reappeared in the neighborhood he was quickly in possession of the information.

During this month the detectives had worked diligently in attempting to solve the double mystery which had thrilled the little town to its center, but one and all were completely baffled.

Not the slightest progress had been made—not a single clew discovered, and the mystery attending the death of Benjamin Wellington and the disappearance of Adrienne De Courcy was as intense now as when the events first took place.

A complete examination of the dead man's affairs had been made.

At first, when it was discovered that the murdered man had left no valuables, it was the current belief that, like a prudent man, he had his property safely stowed away in the vaults of some Safe Deposit Company, but the most persistent search failed to reveal anything of the kind.

Advertisements in regard to the matter were inserted in all the leading newspapers of the city, in the hope that the parties who had charge of the property would come forward and make themselves known.

Of course all this was done on the theory that Benjamin Wellington was a rich man, for most certainly he had lived like one, but at last people began to come to the conclusion that the murdered man was a "fraud," to use the common term.

He was not a rich man, and had never been rich, but where he had procured the money which he had squandered so lavishly was a mystery.

Another strange fact about the man was that he did not appear to have any legal adviser.

Few men in this life who occupy a prominent position can get along without the advice of a lawyer, and it was the general supposition, after Wellington's death, that some legal light, who had attended to his affairs, would come forward and aid in clearing up the darkness in which the affairs of the dead man were involved.

But no legal gentleman appeared to know anything about the affairs of Wellington, and thus again public expectation was disappointed.

Gridley—to give the long-bearded stranger the name which he had announced to the landlord was his when he took up his quarters in the hotel—said he had visited the town with the idea of investing in some property in the neighborhood, and held long interviews with the local real-estate agent in regard to this matter.

And in order to examine the properties which were offered him—which he preferred to do alone—he became well acquainted with the neighboring country.

For a day or two the people of the town stared at the stranger, as they always do at all newcomers, then accepting him as one of themselves paid no more attention to his movements than to those of any other resident.

Had the long-bearded stranger sooner appeared he would surely have been taken for a detective, anxious to solve the double mystery which had so perplexed the good folks of the village.

But though they did not set the stranger down as being engaged in detective business, for all the public sleuth-hounds had abandoned the task in disgust, and they did not think that at this late stage in the game any new bloodhound would come into the field, yet in truth this was what had brought him into the place.

Uncle Sammy alone of the detectives was still a resident of the town, and had become acquainted with all the lounging-places, but none of the village gossips suspected that he was in the sleuth-hound line.

Uncle Sun-Up was absent from the village, though, a good part of the time.

He had business in New York which required attention, he explained, and sometimes he would not be seen in the town for three or four days.

But to return to Gridley.

The game which he had set out to play was an extremely simple one.

The surprise party to which he treated the quadron had revealed to him that it was suspected he had visited the town on no friendly quest.

So far, he had not been able to obtain any clues of importance.

He had come to a standstill and knew not which way to move.

In this quandary then his thought was that if he appeared openly in the village and went around as if he was hot on the trail, the man whom he sought to entrap would take the alarm and endeavor to remove him.

"When he finds that I am right on the spot here and apparently determined to stick to the trail, the chances are a thousand to one that his guilty conscience will not allow him any peace," Gridley mused.

"He will be sure to believe I will be lucky enough to stumble on a clew some time, and he is not the man I take him to be if he does not reason that the best way to put an end to my pursuit will be to put an end to me.

"And when he attempts to strike the blow, then will come my chance to catch him on the hip, for he must surely expose himself and give me a chance at him."

In this world there are often wheels within wheels, plots and counterplots.

And while Gridley was quietly gaining all the information that he could in regard to Benoni Wellraven, without apparently pretending to take any particular interest in the matter, he in turn was watched.

Gridley's principal endeavor was to find out whether there had ever been at Orienta, or in the neighborhood, any woman who answered to the description of Margaret Chadbourne, and who was an acquaintance of the millionaire.

But not the least bit of information could be given in this line.

No such woman had ever been an inmate of Sound View Grange, or resided in the neighborhood as far as he could discover.

"It is as I suspected from the first," he mused, when he came to the conclusion that it was a waste of time to inquire further in regard to this matter.

"He kept her secluded in New York, and in what desolate place on earth can a human be so thoroughly hidden from the most anxious search as in the midst of a big city?

"The wilderness of houses where people live for years side by side without even knowing each other's names!"

Although he could not find out anything about the woman in regard to whom he sought information, he heard enough of the wife of Benoni Wellraven, the Cincinnati Jewess, who had brought him a fortune in addition to his own.

Everybody had a good word for her, although she lived an extremely retired life from the day that she entered Sound View Grange as his mistress.

She was not fond of display, and mingled as little as possible with the people of the neighborhood.

Not that she was proud, or averse to society, or anything of that sort, as the millionaire took pains to explain to his acquaintances; but just after her marriage she sustained a terrible shock in the loss of both her father and mother, killed in a railroad accident while traveling abroad.

This of course caused her immediate withdrawal from society, and even when Time's soothing hand, in a measure, removed her grief, she had been so long absent from the gay world that she felt no inclination to again join in the frivolous amusements in which she had once taken pleasure.

But her charities were almost unbounded, and the servants of the house declared there never had been so sweet a mistress.

Wellraven himself, although stern and cold to all the rest of the world, regarded his wife with an affection which seemed almost to verge on idolatry, and when after a few months only of wedded life death snatched her from him his grief was intense.

In fact, people said he had never seemed to be the same man after the loss of his wife.

He had grown gloomy and misanthropical, and more than one who were well acquainted with the man predicted that it would not surprise them if he ended his days in a mad-house.

This information caused the seeker after knowledge to smile grimly and mutter to himself:

"No, no; no mad-house until I have finished with you, Benoni Wellraven, and then you will be more fit for the gallows than for aught else."

And while Gridley was assiduous in his thirst for information, Bill, the Teaser, and his lieutenant, who was commonly called Banana Tom—right name Tom White, but as he usually peddled bananas from a "barrow" when he condescended to turn his hand to honest toil, this nickname was affixed to him—were keeping a diligent watch upon the long-bearded stranger.

The two looked like a couple of farm hands, and as they told a plausible story of how they had been working on the railroad just over the Connecticut line, and were stopping with a cousin back on the White Plains road while they hunted for work, no one suspected them to be connected with the gang of tramps encamped north of Harrison station, and they were able to loaf around the village without exciting any suspicion.

"I tell you what it is, Banana," exclaimed the Teaser, after they had put in a couple of days at watching the long-bearded stranger, "we have made a mistake in this job!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RUFFIAN'S SCHEME.

BANANA TOM was a dull and stupid fellow when compared to his leader, who was gifted with a large amount of natural shrewdness, and, no doubt, if he had been properly educated and given a right kind of a start in life, he would have made his mark.

"How have we made a mistake?" the lesser ruffian asked.

"What do you make of the long-bearded chap?" responded the Teaser, answering one question by asking another.

"Well," responded the broad-shouldered fellow, shaking his head in a knowing way, "he is a pretty tough customer, I should say."

"Right you are, built from the ground upward. Do you think you could get away with him in a fair fight?"

"Well, I don't know about that. I count myself to be a pretty good man, but then this feller looks as if he might turn out to be a hummer."

"He's got an eye like a gimlet—did you notice how he looks at a feller as if he could see right through him?"

"Oh, yes, you'd better believe I did!"

"We ain't getting the money that we ought to git for this job," and the Teaser shook his head in a doubtful sort of way.

"Well, I don't know about that; a thousand chucks is a good bit of money!"

"Two thousand chucks are more, though," responded the other, with a grin.

"Oh, you kin bet they are!"

"And two thousand is what we ought to have for the job; when I made the arrangements to do the work for a thousand, I hadn't seen the man and had no idea of what kind of a chap he was."

"I took it that he was jest a common sort of a feller—a little two-cent detective cove, and I hadn't any idee of running ag'in a high-flyer of this kind."

"Wot is the peppergram then—strike the boss who put up the job for more ducats?"

"No," replied Bill, with a doubtful shake of the head; "I don't think that game would work."

"From wot I have seen of the party I take it that he is a mighty skeery cuss and that if we attempted to put the screws on him he wouldn't have it, but would kick like a mule and mebber upset the bull thing."

"That would be bad, for in that case we wouldn't collar any ducats," and a dismal look came over the face of the speaker at the bare idea.

"That would be kinder crowding the mourners, wouldn't it?"

"Mighty rough on the boys, you bet."

"Well, having a chance to put that thousand in my 'leather' I don't intend to miss it, I can tell you! But I want to get more on top of it, and so I'm going to 'throw' the race."

"You are too much for me, Teaser; your head is too big! When you come to lead on like that I can't foller yer."

"It will be as plain to you as A B C when you come to git the idee into your noddle."

"First and foremost, the long-headed bloke is worth a thousand dollars to some one when he is dead; and we have taken the contract to fit him for a ride in the first carriage."

"Kerrect."

"Now if he is w'ith a thousand chucks dead it stands to reason that he must be w'ith as much as that to some one alive."

"No, no, Teaser, that don't foller. 'Cos the

man w'ot is willing to put up the thousand to have him crooked, mebber is an enemy of his'n; and if a bloke has plenty of money, it stands to reason he would go a thousand ducats to get rid of a man that he has good reason for wanting out of the way."

"For once in your life you are laying down the law as fine as a Tombs shyster could do!" the Teaser exclaimed.

"That p'int is mighty well put! From the way the bloke talked who made the bargain with me I have an idee that he is fixing things for a chap who don't give a continental for the cash so long as he has things his own way."

"Mebber he is a-blowing in the thousand for revenge; it's nat'rall I've known a heap of men for to do jest sich fool things in my time."

"That's so; there ain't a doubt on it!"

"And, mebber, there ain't anybody else a-breathing the breath of life who would be willing to go a thousand mopuses for the man, dead or alive, but I reckon I can make another thousand out of him, as clean as a whistle, and not half try either!" exclaimed the Teaser, in a boastful sort of way.

"You are one too deep for me, old pal, ag'in; I am over my head and shall have to swim out."

"Watch me then while I give you the lay-out!" cried the other, impressively.

"In the first place we go for the feller and down him—'tain't going to be an easy job either. I shall have to do a heap of planning, and I reckon it will take every man we have in the gang to do the work up prime."

"Now, then, we lay the feller out and he croaks, that gives us our first thousand, all right!"

"But in that queer way in which things sometimes happens in this world, the feller turns up ag'in; and it comes out that he hasn't croaked as much as he might."

The other ruffian grinned all over his face as he listened to the development of the plan.

Dull-witted as he was, he had sense to see that if the thing could be worked there was big money in it—as he would have expressed it.

"Oh, it's a great scheme!"

"I bet you it is! if I kin only fix it so that it will work all right, and I think I kin do that, if I git a good ready on."

"A thousand chucks to put the feller out of the way; we do the job and collect the money."

"Then jest as my man is a-rubbing his hands and a-laughing to think how nicely he has laid out his man, I waits on the gen'lman with the information that there has been a hitch in the proceeding, and that the dead man is jest about the liveliest corpus that was ever see'd, and then I shall jest kinder hint, you know, that another thousand would be sure to do the job up prime."

"And if he cuts up rusty?"

"He won't dare to; ain't I got a ring in his nose? Can't I tarn right around and put the long-bearded chap onto him, and then where will he be?"

"That's so."

"Oh, no; he'll come to it as gentle as a lamb! We kin collar the second thousand easier than we do the first, for it won't be as much work to bring the bloke to life as it will be to lay him out in the first place."

"But I say, Teaser, have you thought how to fix it so as to get the first money? You will have to satisfy the chap that the bloke is dead before you can draw it."

"Yes; I know about that, and I've got my head to work on it now. Don't you be afeard! I'll hatch some plan for to cover that point."

"I am to meet the boss to-night and receive the first hundred, and by that time I will have some scheme fixed up."

"From the way it looks to me now it 'pears that I can do the thing up brown; but I ain't easy in my mind yet 'bout how I shall do the first trick."

And all through the long afternoon while the pair "loafed" the time away the master-ruffian wrestled with this problem, and by the time that night had arrived he announced to his companion that he thought he had arrived at a satisfactory solution.

After darkness set in the Teaser bade his companion wait for him at a beer saloon on the Rye Neck side of the bridge much frequented by the workmen of the town while he proceeded to keep his appointment with the unknown who was acting as the agent of a man who had apparently plenty of money or else he never would have been willing to put such a sum as a thousand dollars on a man's life.

The stone walls which hemmed in the approaches to the bridge over the Mamaroneck River are great lounging-places for the idlers of the town, and on this night in question there were at least a dozen people squatting on the walls, swapping lies, to use the local expression.

On the extreme end of the wall furthest from the bridge and apart from the rest sat the man whom the tramp leader wished to see.

The stranger espied the Teaser as soon as he came over the bridge, and waiting until he had made sure that the ruffian had seen him, crossed the street and went down the slight hill which led to the propeller dock.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ASSAULT.

ON this night of which we write the propeller was in New York, so there wasn't anything to attract anybody to the dock, consequently it was deserted.

A better place for two men to hold a conference, without danger of being overheard, it would have been hard to find in the town.

"You are prompt, I see," the stranger remarked, as they took a seat upon a boat, turned bottom upward, on the dock.

"Yes, I'm allers up to time."

"Have you arranged any plan?"

"Oh, yes."

"That is good; there's nothing like acting promptly in these matters."

"Oh, I've been right on his heels, a-lookin' arter him, and you kin bet all ye'r' wu'th that I have got the jig down as fine as kin be!"

"When will you do the work?"

"To-morrow night, I reckon; that is, if my scheme works and I get a fair chance at him."

"If it don't work, then I will either have to wait until it does, or hatch a new one."

"Have you any objection to telling me how you propose to do the job?"

"Not the slightest! Don't you represent the boss—ain't you the bloke w'ot pays the money?"

"Oh, no, I never tried for to make a secret of my ideas from the man w'ot is a-paying ov me. I don't call that square."

"I should say not."

"The lay-out is an elegant one, I'm thinking!" the Teaser declared, evidently with honest pride.

"This bloke is a sort of a detective, you were saying, I think."

"Yes, he is; only an amateur, though."

"Well, do you know, I would have suspicioned that if you hadn't told me, 'cos I think both his hair and beard are false!"

"Do you think so?" exclaimed the other, with a slight start.

"Oh, I feel sure of it—as sure as that I sit here this blessed min'tel!"

"It is likely," and the man seemed to be in a brown study as he spoke.

"He's in disguise here, a-smelling out some game; but I'll soon put a stop to that."

"The trick that I am going to make is jest this 'ere one."

The stranger listened eagerly.

"I'm a-going to pick out one of my best men, a soft-tongued little cove, able to talk the legs off an iron pot, and then to swear the bottom out afterward."

"He'll go to this bloke and tell him a 'ghost' story 'bout how a party in the town has suspicioned he is a detective, and wants to see him in private, so as to be able to make a confession to him, so that the law kin step in and make things right."

"Have the cove hint, you know, that it is something about this gal who cut her lucky from here so mysteriously a while ago."

"S'posin' a good yarn 'bout how the party is afraid to see him 'cept 'round about midnight when the town is in bed, and no one will be apt to find out what is going on."

"He will bite, I think. I reckon there isn't much doubt about that," the other said.

"Then, with my pal, he comes down this way for to go over the bridge," the Teaser continued.

"On the bridge my pal finds me stretched out and pretty drunk apparently."

"He asks Long Beard to help him lift the poor drunken man to his feet."

"In course he will do it, and then I watches my chance to take him a lick over the head with a club and knock him into the river."

"The tide is dead high about half-past eleven, and if we do the job about midnight, the ebb will have set in by that time and it will carry the body out into the bay, and from there to the Sound, so if the blow don't break the man's head and make an end to him, the water will be certain to do it."

"An excellent scheme," exclaimed the stranger approvingly.

"And I can't see any reason why it shouldn't succeed."

"Oh, I reckon it will work," the Teaser asserted, confidently.

"And now another thing! W'ot is the use of your bother to deposit this money in New York? Why can't the hull trick be worked right here in this place?"

"Why can't you be in the neighborhood somewhere, and see with yer own eyes that the job is done up right to the handle?"

"I don't see any objection to that," the other observed, after thinking the matter over for a moment.

"It seems to me that it will save a heap of trouble. You can see him slugged with your own eyes, and then you kin be certain that the job is done."

"You will be able to recognize the bloke easily enuff, you know, by his beard. You can't mistake him if you git a good square look at him."

"Oh, no; then there will be a moon to-mor-

row night as there is to-night, so I will not have any trouble in seeing him on the bridge."

"As they have torn down the old shanty where the fish-house used to be, you can stand right under the bridge and see the bloke go down inter the water, and you kin tell pretty well by the way he strikes, and what he does arter he gits into the stream, whether he is settled or not."

As it happened, just at this time, an ancient shanty, which stood on the western shore of the river, right on the bank of the stream, and adjacent to the bridge, had been torn down to make room for a new building, so it was possible for any one to stand almost directly under the bridge on the Mamaroneck side of the river.

"Oh, yes, I can satisfy my mind on that point beyond a doubt, and I think your suggestion in regard to the money is a good one."

"Well, guv'nor, it seems to me as it will save us a heap of trouble," the tramp captain replied.

"In course I am anxious for to handle the ducats as soon as I kin arter the job is done, and I s'pose you would rather get quit of the matter."

"Yes, decidedly. The sooner I can pay you the money after the work is done, the better I will like it."

"And, by the by, here is the hundred in advance," and the stranger took a small roll of bills from his pocket and gave it to the Teaser, who clutched it, eagerly.

"You'll find five twenties there. I told the boss to give me small bills, as I thought you would prefer them."

"Yes, it is better; folks in the country hereabouts are apt to stare at a man if he goes to git a large bill changed."

"The thousand will be all in tens so you can divide with your pals without any trouble. I will have the money in a small sachel, and I will place it against the bridge wall, say about six feet from the edge of the dock, because after the job is completed I shall feel like getting away from the spot as soon as possible."

"You see I haven't the experience in these matters such a man like you undoubtedly possesses, and, I admit, I expect to be mighty nervous."

"Of course I am well paid by my boss, for what I am doing, or else I wouldn't risk it."

"It's no joke, you know, for a man to thrust his neck so near a halter."

"Oh, it's nothing when you get used to it!" exclaimed the Teaser, with a hoarse laugh.

"Mebbe so; but I ain't used to it, and I reckon on the next time I get into a job of this kind it will cost the boss more than he pays me now."

The pair rose to their feet, for all that was necessary had been said.

"You be here to-morrow night with the ducats, and if we don't slip up on something you will get your man."

"All right."

And thus they parted.

Little did the dark-bearded stranger dream of the snare which was being spread to tangle his unwary footsteps.

Again we call upon Old Father Time to hasten the wheels of his chariot.

Four-and-twenty hours have passed away since the briber and the bribed—the master and the tool—sat by the side of the little river and framed the plot which was to compass the destruction of a human life.

To the four-and-twenty hours we will add three more which brings the small hand of the clock to half-way between the figures of eleven and twelve.

As the short-bearded stranger had predicted, there was a moon, but, for half of the time there might as well not have been, for a strong western wind had arisen which was driving heavy masses of dark clouds over the sky, partially obscuring the moon's rays every now and then.

The street was deserted, not a soul was in sight, and not even a light gleamed from a window to denote that some industrious soul was burning midnight oil in toil or watching by the couch of sickness.

Out from the darkness, coming from the direction of the Post Road skulked the dark figure of a man, hugging the shadows to escape observation, although no eyes were near to observe him.

Descending the hill the new-comer took up a position so as to command a view of the approach to the bridge.

It was the stranger with the short, dark beard and tangled hair.

In one hand he carried a small sachel, in the other a heavy revolver.

Patience he waited.

Midnight drew near.

Footsteps sounded on the air.

Two men approached the bridge, coming down the street which led to the railroad station.

Despite the uncertain light of the moon the watcher got a pretty good view of them as they entered upon the bridge.

Gridley, the stranger whose death was desired, was easily recognized by his long beard; the other was a short, thin fellow.

The moment the two gained the bridge the

watcher left the dark spot where he had crouched to avoid observation and ran with noiseless steps in close to the bridge wall.

In the center of the structure the two came upon an apparently drunken man.

The watcher could distinctly hear the pair as they assisted the other to his feet.

Then there was the sound of a struggle and a heavy blow.

The figure of a man was shoved through the side of the bridge, and as it hung there for a moment before falling the watcher raised his revolver and put two bullets through the body, firing so quickly that the second report seemed but the echo of the first.

Then dropping the bag he took to his heels and retreated with the speed of a greyhound.

It was a dead body which struck the water, for the bullets had been sped with a careful aim.

The bearded man had made assurance doubly sure.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A BOLD MOVEMENT.

FOR a moment the two men upon the bridge gazed down upon the dark water, which had received the body of the murdered man, with awe written upon their countenances.

The assassination had been so entirely unexpected that it came upon them with the force of a thunder-clap, filling them with horrified amazement.

But they were not men though to allow themselves to remain long under such a spell, particularly when there was danger in so doing, for the two upon the bridge were no other than Bill, the Teaser, and his lieutenant, Banana Tom.

"We must get out of this," Bill exclaimed, hoarsely, recovering from his surprise with a sudden start.

"That 'ere noise may wake up some of the folks 'round here, and they might take it into their heads to ax some impudent questions."

"We'll catch on to the boodle and be off!"

"Right you are!" exclaimed the other, sententiously.

And then the two hurried from the bridge.

They descended to the spot where their mysterious employer had crouched, and there, as had been arranged, they found the leather bag.

Bill, the Teaser, anxious to be sure that no trick had been played upon him, opened the bag, and, by the uncertain light afforded by the partly-obscured moon, inspected the contents.

There was a large package of bank-bills neatly done up, and the ruffian felt pretty well satisfied that the unknown had kept faith with him.

"Is it all square do you think?" inquired the other, anxiously.

"Oh, yes, I guess there ain't any doubt about that. But let's git afore any one runs foul of us."

"We needn't go far, you know, only to git away from the bridge, so that if any of these country Jakes are alarmed they won't be able to spot us, 'ces I want time to cogitate a bit on this 'ere matter."

"Down behind the freight-house yonder would be a good place for us to lay low," Banana Tom suggested, nodding toward the old building at the extreme end of the dock near the water.

"Yes, we kin keep a lookout from there and see how the cat jumps."

Down to the freight-house the two hurried, and seeking refuge on the further side of it held a consultation in regard to what had transpired, while at the same time they kept a wary eye upon the bridge and the approaches to it.

They apprehended that the noise made by the revolver of the unknown would rouse some of the townsmen to look into the matter.

But if any of the neighbors had been disturbed by the sounds, the perfect silence which succeeded had tranquilized them, and not a soul deemed it wise to trouble themselves about the matter.

For fully fifteen minutes the two watched in silence, hardly exchanging a word, and then Bill, the Teaser, gave vent to a grunt of satisfaction.

"It's all right, my covey!" he exclaimed.

"Not a blasted one of the country Jakes thinks it is worth while to get out of bed to see who made the noise, so there isn't any danger of our being bothered."

"Yes, that is so," the other assented.

"I say, Bill, this is a mighty strange affair," he continued, after a moment's pause.

"Well, now, you had better believe it is!" the Teaser exclaimed.

"It is the rummiest go that I ever struck since I was hatched."

"You kin bet all the wealth that you will ever git hold of that I never was so astonished. This feller who hired us to do the job seemed such a quiet, sleepy sort of a chap that nobody would ever have thought that it was in him to put up such a job as this."

"And then he pretended, too, that it wasn't his job at all, didn't he?—said as how he was acting for somebody else."

"Yes; that is the way he gave it to me; but that is a fraud, I reckon, for that 'ere leetle pistol business looks mighty like as if he war the man who was bossing the job."

"Ain't much doubt 'bout it, Teaser," the other responded, with a wise shake of the head.

"You see, he was determined to make a sure thing of it. He doubted that the licks on the head that we gave the cove and the water would cook his goose, and so he made up his mind to make a sure thing of it by driving a couple of revolver-bullets through him."

"It was a mighty cute idea, Tom, you kin bet your ducats on that, and there isn't any doubt that the bits of lead settled the man's hash."

"And it goes to show, it seems to me, that this feller wot put up the job ain't no common kind of man," remarked the other, reflectively.

"Oh, you kin bet high on that!" Bill, the Teaser, exclaimed.

"He's a high-flyer, and no mistake; but we ain't through with him yet, although I s'pose he thinks he has done the job right up to the handle."

"Well, as to that, Bill, old pal, the man who gits ahead of you will have to git up pretty early in the morning."

The other nodded complacently; like the majority of men flattery was pleasant to his ears.

"Oh, I kin work a trick once in a while, I reckon," he observed.

"But I didn't calculate on this feller playing his revolver business. That act I didn't look for; but it is too late now to do anything."

"It wasn't my fault that the man got the bullets. If I had knowed that the pistol act was going to be played I might have looked out, but I never thought of such a thing."

"The feller looked like a stupid countryman who would never be up to any such game, and it ain't astonishing that he fooled me."

"That's so," chimed in his companion.

"But I say, Teaser, wot are you a-going to do about the thing now—are you going to try and git hold of the body?"

"Nary time! Wot would be the use of that? The man's dead and I can't bring him to life ag'in."

"But when the body is discovered all the fat will be in the fire."

"Oh, that is all right; what difference does it make? The truth has got to come out some time, and as far as we are concerned, the sooner the better, I should say."

"But now that the coast is clear for us to go ahead, let's be on the move. We have collared the first money out of this job, so we had better go for the second stake."

"Go in, lemons! I'm wid ye!" responded the other ruffian.

The two then left their place of concealment, and crossing the main street of the village proceeded up the avenue which led to the depot.

On the road, a short distance from the hotel and railroad station, was a wagon-shop with the usual motley collection of old vehicles which generally surround such places.

Among these vehicles was a covered wagon, such as grocerymen use.

Bill, the Teaser, halted by the side of the wagon, while his companion went around to the back of the shop and proceeded to untie a horse which was fastened there.

The "rig" belonged to this precious pair.

That is, when we say belonged, we mean that they were using it, for both horse and wagon were owned by a farmer, who resided a mile or so this side of the rocky region where the outlaw gang had their headquarters.

The farmer was a thriftless sort of fellow, who did not think it necessary to securely lock his barns and outbuildings at night, and so the ruffians had no difficulty in borrowing his horse and wagon.

The two had ridden into the town, and then hidden the "rig" away in this careful manner, so as to escape observation.

After the horse was harnessed to the wagon, the two got into the vehicle and drove slowly and cautiously to the neighborhood of the hotel.

A hundred yards from the building they halted and alighted from the wagon, and then were careful to fasten the horse, so he would not be apt to take French leave and make for home, which old and sagacious animals are apt to do.

Then the two approached the hotel.

Like experienced cracksmen as they were, they had previously examined the ground, and carefully arranged the details of the affair.

A small ladder, which had been carelessly left in a neighboring shed, gave them access to the roof of the piazza of the hotel.

Then, without difficulty, they raised one of the windows which looked out upon the piazza roof, for, with the usual confidence common to rural districts, no fastenings had been placed upon it.

The moonlight shone into the room, so that they had ample light by means of which to work.

Cautiously they made their way into the apartment.

Upon a bed in the room a man reposed.

It was the mysterious dark-bearded stranger, who had called upon Benoni Wellraven, and

whom the unknown had supposed he saw fall into the river from the bridge with a revolver-bullet through his heart.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CAPTURE.

NOTWITHSTANDING the firm belief of the mysterious countryman, who had made the bargain with the tramps for the assassination of the bearded stranger, that his unerring aim had driven a pair of revolver-bullets through the body of the man whose death he so eagerly sought, here was the supposed victim, reclining peacefully in his bed, evidently worth a dozen dead men.

The riddle is easily explained.

True to the instincts of his class, Bill, the Teaser, had determined to make all the money he possibly could out of the affair, and the moment he discovered that the unknown was willing to pay so large a price for the assassination of the marked man, he came to the conclusion that if by any clever trick he could make the stranger believe the victim was killed, so he could get hold of the money, and yet at the same time avoid doing the job, and then contrive to get the intended victim into his hands, he would be able to make a good thing out of it.

The detective officers were not far from right in their opinion that there were few smarter criminals in the country than Bill Carmine, otherwise Bill, the Teaser.

As the tramp leader was wont to boast, he had a head on his shoulders, and therefore he was not long in arranging a plan whereby he could trick the man who was willing to pay so liberally for his services.

His scheme was a simple one.

He selected one of the gang who nearly resembled the stranger in build, arrayed him in a suit of dark clothes, similar to that worn by the other, then procured a wig and beard, and when the man donned these, at a short distance, he presented a striking likeness to the dark-bearded stranger.

The resemblance was so great that the unknown, who thirsted for his blood, was completely deceived by it, and, after sending the death-dealing bullets, took to flight, satisfied he had accomplished the death of his foe.

Both the Teaser and his lieutenant, Banana Tom, were for the moment astounded by the unexpected result, for it had been arranged between them and the ruffian who was playing the part of the dark-bearded stranger, that he should pretend to be stunned and allow himself to be thrown into the river.

The fellow was a regular water-dog, and the moment he reached the stream it would be an easy matter for him to play the part of a man who had been stunned into insensibility.

As the reader has seen they had sent their confederate to a sudden death, owing to the unexpected action of the countryman, and although for a moment they were astounded at the unforeseen result; yet, on the principle that it was of no use to cry over spilt milk, they accepted the matter in a philosophical way.

The mischief was done, and although they felt that they had sent the man to his death, yet they consoled themselves by reflecting that it was his fate with true Oriental calmness.

If it had not been his destiny to die in such a way he would have escaped; they were but the blind agents of Providence in the matter.

But though the man had perished, they had secured the reward offered for the assassination, so the scheme had worked all right, and now they were engaged in carrying out the second part of it.

It was their design to make the dark-bearded man a prisoner, transport him to their retreat, and hold him there until they could ascertain who would pay the most money, the stranger to escape from his confinement, or the unknown countryman for the purpose of putting an end to him.

The untimely death of the disguised ruffian of course had no bearing on this movement.

So far the programme had been carried out. They had succeeded in gaining access to the room of the man upon whom they designed to operate without exciting any alarm.

Now the problem was to get the sleeper from the hotel to their retreat in the woods without raising a disturbance.

Bill, the Teaser, was an old hand at all this kind of thing, however, and had carefully arranged all the details before entering upon the business.

The hardest part of the task was to gain admission to the room without awakening the man who slept therein.

This having been accomplished without difficulty, the rest was all plain sailing to these accomplished rascals.

The first thing was to take advantage of the helplessness of the sleeping man and stupefy him so that he could be easily handled.

This was quickly accomplished by means of a sponge saturated with chloroform.

Both of the men grasped the sleeper and put their weight upon him, while Bill, the Teaser, applied the sponge to his nostrils, so that when he partially awoke and attempted to struggle he found himself held as in iron bands.

Under the circumstances, of course, it only took a few minutes for the powerful drug to take effect upon him, and soon his struggles ceased and he lay helpless in the hands of his assailants.

"Make his clothes up into a bundle while I carry him to the wagon," the outlaw leader commanded.

Then wrapping one of the bed-blankets around the senseless man, Bill, the Teaser essayed to put him over his shoulder, but soon discovered that, strong as he was, the task was too much for him, and so he was obliged to call upon his companion for assistance.

"You will have to give me a hand, Tom," he said.

"The bloke is too big for me to handle alone."

The other arranged the bundle so as to sling it on his arm and then came to the assistance of the outlaw leader.

Between the two they managed to carry the senseless man down the ladder and then they deposited him in the wagon.

They had taken the precaution to close the window after them so that no clew would be left in regard to their nocturnal visit.

They were equally careful to return the ladder to the place from whence they had taken it.

And after this was done the two got into the wagon, first unhitching the horse, and then away they went.

They proceeded at a walk until they got away from the neighborhood of the hotel and crossed the railroad track, then they started the animal into a brisk trot and did not allow him to falter in his pace until their retreat in the desolate, rocky region to the north was reached.

Banana Tom drove, while Bill, the Teaser, with the sponge and bottle of chloroform, kept watch upon the victim, ready to apply a fresh dose of the drug if their prey seemed likely to wake from the stupor into which he had been thrown.

As will be perceived, this was not the first time that the ruffian had played the "chloroform act."

Few words passed between the two on the homeward route, which the horse managed to get over in about half an hour, for he was a pretty good traveler, being like a singed cat, far better than he looked.

After leaving the neighborhood of the hotel Banana Tom remarked:

"Wot do you s'pose the hotel bloke will say when he finds out in the morning that this 'ere cove is gone?"

"He'll reckon that he played the fly-by-night act on him and got away with the blanket," the other responded, with a grin.

"Don't you think he will tumble to this job?"

"Nary time! What is there to make him think there is anything of that kind 'bout the matter?"

"He don't know that anybody has got a grudge ag'in' the man and is willing to pay big money to get him out of the way, and when he finds out that the blanket is missing, won't it be dollars to cents that he'll be sure to get the idea that the feller has cut his lucky with it?"

"Yes; but there's the door locked on the inside, you know," Banana Tom urged, "and that will show that the cove didn't git out that way."

"Oh, but the door ain't locked on the inside, for I took care to turn the key," responded Bill, the Teaser, with a grin.

"You let your uncle alone for fixing a job of that kind up in first-rate style."

"I ain't been cracking cribs twenty years for nothing! The cove came to the hotel without any baggage, he didn't give no particular account of himself, and as these country Jakes are always suspicious, the odds are big that when they discover he is among the missing, the hotel boss will make sure that he has collared the blanket and skipped."

The reasoning seemed good, and the two chuckled over the idea.

When they arrived at the tramp's retreat, the prisoner had been consigned to a cellar which had been prepared for his reception, a deep, dark, dungeon-like place, situated under the house which was occupied by the outlaw chief and his lieutenant, the rest of the gang being quartered in the other house.

"Now then we have done the trick, and if we can't make another thousand out of the job I ain't got no 'udgment!" Bill, the Teaser, declared.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE RUFFIAN EXPLAINS.

A HEAP of hay had been placed in one corner of the cellar and upon it the captive was laid.

A barrel stood in the center of the cellar placed on end, and upon this a candle burned, stuck in a turnip in lieu of a candlestick.

A flight of rickety wooden steps led down into the apartment and a massive trap-door was at the head of the steps.

There wasn't any window in the cellar or any way of gaining access to it except by way of the trap-door.

The walls were composed of rough stones, for the house was located in a stony region and the

original inhabitants used the stones in all possible ways in order to get them off the fields which they desired to till.

And the cellar, having been unused for so many years, was about as damp and unwholesome a place as can be imagined, more nearly resembling one of the ancient dungeons such as the old-time robber knights had under their castles wherein to confine dangerous enemies than the cellar attached to the dwelling of a peaceful farmer.

But a better place for carrying out the purpose which the ruffians had in view would have been difficult to find.

The apartment was so situated and so constructed that it would puzzle the most expert jail-bird to escape from it, and so isolated that if a captive was to yell at the top of his lungs no one would be apt to hear the outcry.

After the stupefied man was placed upon the hay in the corner the ruffians proceeded to examine the clothes belonging to the captive, and their eyes sparkled when at the first dive into the pockets a well-filled pocketbook rewarded the search.

There were fifty dollars in bills in the pocketbook besides a couple of dollars in silver.

"He was well-heeled," remarked Bill, the Teaser with a grin, as he stowed the pocketbook with its valuable contents away in his own capacious pocket.

"You bet!" cried the other, as he drew out a pair of revolvers of the British Bulldog pattern, self-acting tools, small weapons, yet carrying a heavy ball.

And then from another pocket came a pair of handcuffs which Bill, the Teaser examined with a critical eye.

He was a judge in such matters, for in the course of his career he had worn quite a number of "bracelets" of this kind.

"A beautiful pair," he remarked, as he held them up for the inspection of his companion.

"The latest pattern, and as good as I ever saw," he continued, while his companion nodded assent.

Banana Tom had had considerable experience with "ornaments" in this line also.

"This pair of darbies kinder looks as if the countryman who hired us to knock this chap on the head was giving it to me straight when he said he was in the detective-line."

"Yes, that is so; but I didn't take any stock in the yarn before."

"Neither did I; I thought he was trying to fool me with a 'ghost' story."

There was also a memorandum-book in one of the stranger's pockets, but the leaves had not been written upon, nor were there any papers upon the person to show who he was, or what business had brought him to this quiet village on the Sound.

The Teaser was somewhat disappointed at this for he had counted upon getting a clew as to who and what the man was.

Just as the examination came to an end the prisoner moved and a half-groan escaped from his lips.

"Hello! he's coming to!" the Teaser exclaimed.

"Take your seat on the stairs, Banana, and cover him with your revolver, for he may have a notion of cutting up rusty, and he's such a big chump that I ain't sure but what he would get away with me in a fair scrap."

The other obeyed.

He ascended the steps about half-way, sat down, drew out his revolver and cocked it.

Bill, the Teaser, took a seat upon an old box which stood a yard or so away from the barrel, and he also drew his pistol and proceeded to put it in order for immediate action.

It was plain that neither of the ruffians held lightly the prowess of the man whom they had captured.

The power of the potent drug which had enchaind the senses of the dark-bearded stranger was rapidly diminishing.

He gasped—drew a long breath, stretched his arms out and then opened his eyes.

He gazed with a vacant look around him for a moment as though he was not yet in possession of his senses, and then, all of a sudden, fixed his eyes upon the ruffians, rising to a sitting position as he did so.

"Well?" he said, in the quietest possible way, and from the tone the tramp leader came to the conclusion that he was puzzled to account for the situation in which he found himself.

"How are you, sport?" said Bill, the Teaser, with a nod and a grin.

"I s'pose you ain't quite got it through your noodle 'bout how this thing is?"

"Oh, yes, I think I understand all about it," immediately replied the other, and from the way in which he spoke it was plain he was in full possession of his senses.

"I have been kidnapped by you two gentlemen, and I must admit that you have done the job in a very workmanlike manner, but why on earth you have taken all this trouble is a mystery, for I don't see what you can possibly gain by it."

That the dark-bearded man was an extremely cool hand was quite apparent, and this speech rather made the two ruffians open their eyes.

Bill, the Teaser, was inclined, though, to take it as a good sign.

He liked to do business with men of brains. It was much easier to get along with such than with thick-headed, commonplace fellows, in his opinion.

"I kin explain the hull business to you in a mighty few words," he observed.

"But before we come down to particulars, you had better git into yer clothes—there they are by your side—for the air of this 'ere place is mighty damp and you might git an attack of the rheumatics the fust thing you know."

The advice was good and the prisoner immediately proceeded to comply with it.

And as he began to dress himself, the tramp leader remarked:

"By the way, I forgot to mention that we have been through your clothes and taken all your valuables so as to keep 'em safe for you."

"That is our rule allers, jest the same as in all prisons, you know," and then the fellow grinned as if he imagined he had given utterance to a good joke.

And his companion, too, gave vent to a hoarse chuckle as token that he appreciated the jest.

"I perceive that I have been subjected to the searching process, and as you say it is your rule I presume I ought not to complain," the captive remarked, proceeding with his dressing just as if nothing out of the common had occurred.

Decidedly the prisoner was an odd fish.

Then, when he had finished dressing, he seated himself upon the hay and, fixing his eyes upon Bill, the Teaser, said in the most careless way possible:

"Now then, I am ready for you; fire away."

The ruffian leader, being a man of genius and an extremely cool hand himself, could appreciate the hardihood displayed by the other, and was not slow to express his admiration.

"Well, may I be hanged, if you ain't about the coolest chap I ever run across!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, I generally manage to take things pretty easy, and in regard to hanging; it goes without saying that the chances are about a hundred to one that you will be hanged if you keep on in your present way of life."

The tramp leader scowled; he didn't relish this pleasantry at his expense.

"The rope is not spun that will hang me!" he cried, defiantly.

"Maybe not, but that is one of those things that are mighty hard to decide."

"It is possible though that the bullet of some 'fly cop' may cut your thread of life in twain."

And this remark was uttered in a reflective sort of way, as though the speaker was meditating deeply upon the likelihood of such an occurrence taking place.

Bill, the Teaser, was nettled, particularly as he heard his companion chuckle audibly from his perch on the stairs.

"See here, you don't want to trouble yourself 'bout me!" he exclaimed in an angry tone.

"You want to look arter yourself! You are in a mighty tight place, you know, and don't you forget it."

"I don't know who you are, or what you are, but there's some man anxious enough to git you out of the way as to be willing to pay a thousand dollars for the job."

At this announcement a look of amazement, evidently not feigned, appeared on the features of the captive.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DRIVING A BARGAIN.

"A THOUSAND dollars for my death?" the prisoner remarked, slowly, and with such doubt plainly apparent in his tones as to indicate that he was not willing to believe the statement.

"That is what I said, and it is the truth too," Bill, the Teaser, asserted stoutly.

"Oh, there must be some mistake about the matter."

"Nary time. Do I look like a man who don't know what he is talking about? Well, I reckon not."

"It is a sure enough thing, and no mistake. I made the trade with the man myself."

"Me and my pal here were to do the job, and we were to get a thousand chucks for it, and what is more we did get it too, for we fooled the man who hired us to kill you—made him believe that the trick was done and collared the ducats."

"Yes, yes, I see; you got the money without having to do the work."

"Exactly, you have hit the nail right on the head."

"I am not the kind of a man to kill the goose which lays golden eggs. No such donkey as that, you bet your sweet life!"

"You see, I reckoned that if it was worth a thousand dollars to any man to have you dead, it would be worth more than that to you for to keep alive."

"Yes, yes; very close reasoning."

"And now to come to the point, gov'nor; do you want to make a bargain with me, or shall I hunt up the man who ponied up the thousand, tell him a ghost-story 'bout how you managed to escape, and how arter a deal of trouble I got

hold on you again and have got you safe and sound?"

"Maybe he will not be willing to pay you anything more," the prisoner suggested, shrewdly.

"As he has already invested a thousand, the chances are great he will think you ought to do the job without asking any more money. I think that if I were in his shoes I would look at the matter in that way."

"It don't signify the wag of a dog's tail how he looks at the thing!" Bill, the Teaser exclaimed, angrily.

"I'm the man who is going to settle the thing. I took his thousand and did the work."

"Leastways, I fixed the thing so that it looked as if I did the work, and he was satisfied it was all right."

"But now that you have come to life ag'in, I want another thousand anyway, or nary thing will I do, and if you want to square me so you kin git out of this hole, it will cost you over a thousand, 'cos you have got to advance on his figure, of course!"

"Suppose you find that this man, who appears to be so very desirous of compassing my death, is willing to give fifteen hundred or two thousand to have me put out of the way?" the captive asked, fixing his keen eyes intently upon the face of the ruffian.

"Why, then, gov'nor, you'll have to 'see' him and go a p'int above."

"The more money I kin git out of the affair the better I shall like it. I'm a reg'lar businessman, and don't you forget it!"

"Of course, I had rather not kill you if I can make as much, or more money by not doing it, and that is the reason why I am giving you the last call."

While the ruffian had been speaking the mind of the dark-bearded prisoner had been busy in reflection.

Now that he was in possession of this information he had very little doubt in regard to the identity of the man who desired his death.

It must be Benoni Wellraven.

The millionaire had taken the alarm; he fancied that the advent in the East of the seeker after knowledge boded danger to him and he was determined to put a stop to any investigation into the misty past.

And of course a better way to throw a man off the trail than by compassing his death could not well be devised.

Being satisfied that to the millionaire he was indebted for his present position, the question naturally arose what was the best course for him to pursue in the matter.

Could he do anything with the ruffian in whose power he was?

Would it be possible to make any bargain with him by means of which his aid could be secured, and a trap contrived to ensnare Benoni Wellraven?

A moment's reflection satisfied this acute reasoner that there wasn't any chance of working this scheme.

The ruffian had openly avowed that his idea was to make all the money out of the matter that he could, and if he was given to understand the game which was being played, it was almost certain that he would decide to aid Wellraven rather than attempt to pull him down.

He had already fingered the money of the arch-scoundrel—as the prisoner believed the millionaire to be—and would be sure to yield to that belief that Wellraven would be both willing and able to pay far more money than any one else, when he comprehended how desperate was the struggle.

Clearly then it was the captive's game not to reveal his plan to his jailer.

Another point.

How much in regard to the millionaire did the ruffian know?

It was the prisoner's idea that the outlaw knew very little about his employer, that, in fact, he did not have any idea as to who the man was, who had proved to be so liberal a paymaster.

He resolved to learn all he could in regard to this, and at the same time came to the conclusion that as he could not hope to bribe the ruffian, for it would be clearly impossible for him to outbid a man of Benoni Wellraven's wealth, all that he could do under the circumstances was to temporize—gain time, so as to be able to get a chance to escape from the trap into which he had fallen.

It only took a few moments for the captive to arrange his plan of action, and, addressing Bill, the Teaser, who had been patiently waiting for him to come to a decision, said:

"My friend, do you know I think there is some mistake about this matter."

"Mistake! how?"

"Why, I don't think I am the man you want at all."

"Oh, yes you are. There isn't the least bit of a mistake about it."

"But it doesn't seem possible to me," the other persisted.

"I don't believe that my life or death concerns anybody very greatly, and I feel perfectly sure that there isn't anybody in the world who would be willing to pay so large a sum as a

thousand dollars for the pleasure of having me put out of the way."

"Ah, there you see is where you are out in your calculation. You are a heap sight more valuable than you think," responded the ruffian with a grin.

"No, no, there is some mistake. I am a stranger here—don't know anybody, and my business is to find two persons who disappeared some years ago."

"Of course, and there is the whole business right in a nutshell," Bill, the Teaser, exclaimed, decidedly.

"This here party who is anxious for you to give your little croak has reasons for not wanting you to go ahead in your little game."

"Mebbe he is afeard that you will find out too much, and that is why he wants to lay you out."

"That may be possible, but I don't think it is very probable; for, as far as I know, no one is aware of what the object of my visit here is."

This of course was not the exact truth, but under the circumstances the sleuth-hound felt that he was justified in attempting to deceive the ruffian into whose power he had fallen.

"Your little game has been found out in some way, and the man who hired me to 'do' you up made up his mind to block it afore you had a chance to do much."

"Have you any objection to telling me what the man looks like who paid you the thousand dollars?"

"Oh, no, but it won't do you no good I reckon, for, of course, he ain't the principal. Anybody could see with half an eye that he was only an agent; such a countrified Jake as he was would never go 'round throwing away a thousand dollars so loosely."

"He looked like a countryman?"

"Yes, he was a countryman, sure enough!"

"I am utterly in the dark," the captive responded, after a moment's thought.

"There's some mistake, I am sure; and you had better find out whether I am the man who is wanted before you take any further steps."

"Well, it don't matter much to me whether you are the man or not so long as I get the boodle all right!" the ruffian exclaimed, with a chuckle.

"Well, since you don't care to do anything 'bout the thing I'll try the other party, but you shall have a fair show, 'cos arter he makes his offer I'll give you a chance to bid."

Then the ruffians retired, carrying the light with them, and after they closed the trap-door the captive could distinctly hear them place a heavy stone upon it.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE BODY.

It was a bright and pleasant morning which followed the night on which transpired the stirring events related in our last chapter.

The millionaire, Benoni Wellraven, had gone out for a drive in his elegant turn-out, reputed to be the finest in the neighborhood, and about ten o'clock in the morning drove through the village of Mamaroneck, halting at the post-office to inquire for mail.

The postmaster hastened to wait upon the "great man," and, as he came out to the edge of the sidewalk, eager to save even the servant of the millionaire from leaving the carriage, Wellraven's eyes were attracted by a small crowd of citizens gathered by the water on the steamboat dock near the freight-house.

"What is the matter over yonder, Mr. Coyd?" the millionaire asked, addressing the postmaster.

"Haven't you heard the news, Mr. Wellraven?" the postmaster replied.

"No, nothing this morning—what is it—some accident?"

"Oh, no, sir, more like a murder!" the other exclaimed, with all the alacrity bred of the desire to be the first to communicate the startling intelligence.

"A murder! Is it possible?"

"Yes, sir, I am afraid it is."

"One of our citizens?"

"No, sir, a stranger."

"A stranger, eh?"

"Yes, no one knows the man, but some of the Rye Neck people who happened to be over and took a look at the body say that it looks like a tramp who had been begging up that way during the past week."

"A tramp, eh?"

And from the careless way in which the question was put it was apparent that the millionaire took no particular interest in the matter, but was just talking to pass away the time, which, in the country, is apt to hang heavy on the hands of men who lead idle lives.

"Yes, the fellow is dressed in quite a decent suit of clothes, but the Rye Neck people feel sure it is the same man, although when he was up their way he wore a very shabby suit."

"Quite mysterious!" Wellraven commented.

"I presume the fellow stole the suit somewhere."

"Yes, that is the supposition, and then was shot after he got it on and attempted to escape."

"He was shot, then?"

"Yes, twice, right in the region of the heart."

"Poor wretch!"

"Two terrible wounds, either one sufficient to cause death, I believe."

"Where was the body discovered?"

"Right on the beach by Huntley's Hotel—that is the little summer hotel on the Point, you know."

Wellraven nodded.

"It was on the Sound side of the beach, and the supposition is that the fellow broke into some of the houses out by the Sound, stole the suit of clothes and then was shot in making his escape, and in his death-agonies he ran into the water and the flood tide brought the body in and cast it on the beach."

"Quite likely."

"And what makes it more probable that the fellow had been up to some mischief is the fact that he had on a wig and a false beard which completely disguised his appearance."

A look of amazement appeared on the face of the millionaire and he compressed his thin lips in a nervous sort of way.

"Very remarkable—very remarkable," he observed, after a moment's pause, as he saw that the eyes of the official were fixed upon him, and that he was expected to say something.

"Yes, it is a very strange affair indeed; and there wasn't a single article found in the man's pockets, either."

"The coroner has been sent for, but he has not yet arrived."

"Wouldn't you like to go over and take a look at the body?—there isn't anything repulsive about it, although the fellow was evidently a hard drinker and his face is considerably bloated."

"Yes, I think I would."

The postmaster saw that the millionaire had allowed himself to become considerably interested in the matter, and, glad of the opportunity to be of service to him, he hastened into the store, got his hat, and then conducted Wellraven, who quitted the carriage, to where the body, which had been cast up on the beach by the waves, was lying in the shade of the freight-house.

The millionaire was well known, and the crowd respectfully made way for him.

Earnestly Benoni Wellraven gazed upon the features of the dead man.

It was not the face which he had expected to see, although he was in a measure prepared for the disappointment by the statement which the official had made to him.

The dead man was not the dark-bearded stranger who had called upon him, but on the contrary a common-looking fellow, and the millionaire had little doubt that the men who believed that in the deceased they recognized a tramp who had been begging in the neighborhood, were not mistaken.

Just at this moment the coroner arrived, and as, in deference to the millionaire's position, he begged him to remain and assist him in the inquest, much against his will Wellraven was detained, for he did not deem it policy to refuse.

When the inquest was finished and the coroner's jury brought in their verdict, which was to the effect that the man had come to a violent death by the hands of parties unknown, Wellraven departed.

It was the general opinion that the man had met his fate while engaged in some unlawful object, and when the opinion of the millionaire was asked, he said that in his mind there wasn't the least doubt that the supposition was correct.

Wellraven entered his carriage and was driven home.

And all the way his face was dark, and his brow wrinkled with anxious thoughts.

He remained at home all the rest of the day, and all the servants who chanced to come in contact with him noticed that he seemed to be in an extremely gloomy mood.

After dinner was over—he dined late, at the fashionable hour of six—he shut himself up in his library, leaving orders that he must not be disturbed.

This was so common a custom with him that it excited no comment, but after darkness had descended upon the earth, so that his movements would be covered, the millionaire passed through one of the library windows to the lawn, and made his way to the boat-house.

As Benoni Wellraven, the millionaire owner of Sound View Grange, he entered the building, but when he came from it, rowing a light skiff, he had so disguised his appearance that his most intimate friend would never have recognized him.

But the reader who remembers the description of the man, who sought the aid of the tramps in their lair, would have immediately perceived that the man in the skiff and he were one.

Wellraven merely used the boat as a means to enable him to quit the place without the

knowledge of any one, for after getting around into the creek outside of the boundary line of his estate he landed.

He was at this time engaged in building a seawall in this neighborhood, and to accommodate the extra horses—common working brutes which he was using—had constructed a shanty-like stable down by the shores of the creek.

The stable was locked, for all the workmen were gone long before, but as Wellraven had a key, he had no difficulty in gaining entrance.

In the stable was a buggy, much the worse for wear—just such a vehicle as is common on country roads.

Wellraven harnessed one of the horses to it and then drove off.

There wasn't the slightest danger of anybody interfering with him, for no one ever came near the stable after it was shut up for the night.

Straight northward went the disguised man, and he halted not until he arrived in the neighborhood of the wild region where the tramps had found a retreat.

Then he hid his horse and vehicle in a convenient thicket and proceeded on foot.

He went on without dread of danger, for in his pocket, handy to his grasp, was the self-acting six-shooters, which had brought death to the man who personated the dark-bearded stranger.

The tramps were congregated around the fire as usual, and Bill, the Teaser, sitting apart from the rest, fully a hundred feet nearer the road, seemed to be on the lookout for a visitor.

He perceived the disguised millionaire the moment he made his appearance, and rising came forward to meet him.

Wellraven halted when he saw that his approach was observed.

The two were sheltered from the observation of the rest by the trees which fringed the road.

"So, you played a trick upon me last night!" Wellraven exclaimed when the ruffian came up to him.

"You took my money but did not give me the man."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY.

"UPON my word, guv'nor, I was as badly sold in the business as you were," Bill, the Teaser, asserted.

"You kin bet all you have got that it was no game of mine. I planned the job right up to the handle, and thought I had the thing fixed so that there couldn't be any slip-up to it, but this feller was a downy cove and played roots on me."

Wellraven glanced suspiciously at the man. Despite his loud protestations he doubted him.

"Then you were not a party to the trick?"

"You kin bet yer life I wasn't," the ruffian cried, earnestly.

"Oh, no, guv'nor, I tell you w'ot it is, I am one of the squarest men in the business that you ever run across; a bargain is a bargain with me, and I live up to my word every time."

"The feller smoked the trap and got this other chap to walk into it."

"Then it was not your doings, and the man who was killed was not a member of your band?"

"Oh, no, I never saw the man before, and I got a good look at him too. I was in the village to-day when the coroner took hold of the business."

Wellraven knew this well enough, for he had noticed that Bill, the Teaser, was one of the crowd.

"Well, even if you are innocent in regard to the matter, and had nothing to do with the trick, yet you must admit you didn't live up to your agreement."

"Oh, yes, guv'nor, I'll admit that," the ruffian replied, immediately.

"I tried to do the job up brown for you, but the bloke was too much for me. He was too fly, you know."

"And I paid the money for nothing."

"That's so; there ain't no two ways about that. I'm a gentleman, I am, and allers tries to deal fair and square with the men who make a deal with me; and I must say that you ain't had no kind of show in this 'ere matter for your money at all."

"What are you going to do about it?" Wellraven asked, abruptly.

"Oh, I'm going to square the thing with you. Don't you forget it, either. I'm not the kind of man for to take ducats without doing my best to earn them."

"The bloke was too smart for me the first time, but when it came to the second-hand round, I played trumps and caught him for all he was worth."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that I have my man as safe as a bug in a rug!"

Despite the great self-control which Wellraven had over himself, he could not avoid a slight start when this intelligence fell upon his ears.

"You have him safe?" he asked, striving hard to repress the joy which thrilled him.

"Oh, you kin bet I have!" the ruffian replied, triumphantly.

"The moment the feller went off the bridge, and I got a view of his face, I saw that the bloke had been too cunning for me, and I swore I would git even with him.

"I didn't have a chance to say anything to you about it, 'cos you dusted too quickly, but I went to work at once and laid a trap for my bird."

"And you caught him then?" Wellraven exclaimed, with an eagerness which he could not conceal.

"Yes, I've got him in the cellar of one of the houses yonder, and his life is yours, if you want it."

"Well, I have been paid to put him out of the way, and, like you, I am a man who likes to live up to his bargain," Wellraven remarked.

"As far as I am concerned, myself, you know, it isn't anything to me, only that I can make a stake out of it."

"I see, I see; same way as myself," remarked Bill, the Teaser, with an approving nod.

"Yes, and, of course, if I don't do the trick there'll be no stake."

"Certainly, that's business. But, I tell you what it is, old man, you have got the feller dead to rights now."

"I've got him foul, but there's one leetle difficulty in the way."

"What is it?"

"I had to let some of my pals into the thing, of course; couldn't work the trick without their help, you know, and this bloke has been talking mighty big to them, saying that he would give a pile of money to git out of the hole, and so he has kinder got them worked up to the idea that there is a big stake in the thing."

Wellraven understood what the ruffian was driving at well enough.

It mattered not whether the tale was true or false—whether the prisoner had made promises, or refrained from saying a word, the ruffians had scented that money could be made, and were determined to have all they could get.

And to such a man as Wellraven what did a thousand or so of dollars matter so long as he contrived to destroy the man whom he believed to be a deadly foe?

"I suppose you want me to bid against him?" he exclaimed, bluntly.

"Well, old pal, 'tain't me as is a-doing it, you know," Bill, the Teaser, protested.

"It is all the talk of this bloke w'ot has got the boys up on their ears."

"But I says to them, says I, 'You may talk as you please, my man is going to have a chance to make the last bid, anyhow.'"

Wellraven nodded, as much as to say that he approved of this idea.

"And that is the way the thing stands."

"Oh, that is all right; I don't blame the boys for trying to make as big a stake as they can," Wellraven remarked, with a well-assumed expression of carelessness.

"This fellow, though, can't outbid the man I represent. For every dollar that he is willing to give my man will give two."

"That's the kind o' talk I like to hear!" exclaimed the ruffian, with a grin.

"But I say, I would like to have a look at the bird, so as to be sure he is the man I want," Wellraven remarked.

He was determined that there shouldn't be any mistake about the matter this time.

"Oh, cert., of course; that's natural, seeing as how the old thing failed to work the first time, but we'll put her through this deal, and you kin bet your boots on it!"

"If you don't mind the boys, you can come right up to the house and take a look at him now."

"Oh, that is all right; they need not know my business."

"Of course not! When I spoke about the boys kicking for to make as big a stake out of the matter as they could, I didn't mean all the gang, you know."

"Only a couple of 'em; my lieutenants, kinder."

"I understand."

"I wouldn't go for to trust a secret like this to all the gang, although there isn't a cove among them but what is true blue—no kickers or squealers; but then it don't do to have too many cooks or the chances are the soup will be spoiled."

"Very true."

"But come on and take a look at your man."

And then Bill, the Teaser, led the way to the old house in the cellar of which the prisoner was confined.

The tramps merely glanced at the stranger as he passed.

Seeing him in company with their captain they understood that he had visited their retreat upon business.

Banana Tom was within the house stretched upon a rude bunk in the room where the trap-door gave access to the cellar.

There was a candle burning upon a barrel which served for a table.

The tramp lieutenant was only dozing and

awoke immediately when the others entered the room.

"How's your man?" Bill, the Teaser, asked.

"All right, I guess, for I ain't heard a sound," responded the other, with a glance at the heavy stone which was placed upon the trap-door.

"This gent would like for to git a look at him so as to be sure that we have got hold of the right feller," the tramp captain remarked.

"Oh, there ain't any doubt 'bout that," the other replied, confidently.

"Give me a hand with the stone and then git your revolver out in case he should try to make a rush," observed Bill, the Teaser, to Banana Tom.

The two lifted the stone from the trap-door, then Banana Tom drew his revolver while Bill took the candle.

"Now if you will lift up the trap," the ruffian said to Wellraven, "I will hold the candle so you kin get a good look at him."

"All right."

Wellraven opened the trap-door and then descended. Bill came next, while Banana Tom with the revolver brought up the rear.

But no sooner had the tramp captain got fairly into the cellar when a cry of astonishment came from him.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A SURPRISE.

No wonder that the ruffian was amazed.

No wonder that he cried aloud in angry astonishment.

The cellar was empty.

The exclamation of amazement was echoed by Banana Tom the moment he descended the steps sufficiently far to command a view of the cellar.

Wellraven too could see that no prisoner was in the apartment, and although at first he had been inclined to think the ruffians were trying to trick him for a second time, yet when he heard their cries of amazement he believed their angry astonishment was real and not assumed.

"Gone! blamed if he ain't!" cried Bill, the Teaser, as soon as he could speak.

"Blow me tight! if this don't beat all that I ever did see!" exclaimed Banana Tom.

"And it's all your fault, too, you infernal hound!" yelled the tramp leader, turning fiercely upon his satellite.

"Not by a jugful!" responded the other, indignantly. "You don't know what you are talking about for to say that! How could I let him out even if I had wanted to?"

"It takes two men to lift that stone, and then they have got all the work they kin do!"

This was true enough, for the stone was so heavy that it taxed all the powers of the men to move it.

"How did he get out then?" Bill demanded.

"Blame me if I know! I thought this 'ere cellar was safer than a jail."

"Examine the walls," suggested Wellraven, who felt sick at heart at the escape of the man whom he had fancied he had at his mercy.

The suggestion was a good one, and the ruffians acted upon it at once.

The mystery was soon explained.

In the rear of the apartment there had once been a small cellar window, but the dirt had filled it up so that no outward sign of it could be seen.

The prisoner had evidently "sounded" the wall, and so discovered the existence of the window, and then it had been an easy matter for him to tunnel his way through the dirt.

"He can't be far off! If we give chase mebbe we can catch him yet!" Bill, the Teaser, exclaimed.

"He was here all right at six o'clock, 'cos I brought him some grub, and he appeared to be awfully down in the mouth."

"He wasn't feeling gay, you kin bet your life, and I never had no idee that he was thinking 'bout getting out, but you see that was all a blind to throw dust in my eyes."

"Yes, there isn't the least doubt about it, but he hasn't been gone long, and we may be able to lay him by the heels."

"The question is, which way did he go?"

"Back to Mamaronneck, I should think," suggested Wellraven.

"Yes, that is the way he ought to go, but if he was afraid we would get arter him he might think he could throw us off the track by going north toward White Plains."

"If you have men enough it would be wise to cover all the roads," Wellraven remarked.

Although he was careful not to betray it, his interest in the chase was far more intense than that of the tramps.

With them the capture of the escaped prisoner was only a question of money, but the conviction was strong with him that there was going to be a struggle for life and death between himself and the mysterious prisoner, and so he fairly hungered for the blood of the long-bearded stranger.

"We'll git right at it, for we can't afford to lose any time!" Bill, the Teaser, exclaimed.

The three hurried from the cellar.

The men lounging around the fire were questioned, the tramp captain thinking that it was possible that some one of them might have seen the prisoner skulking in the neighborhood at the time when he effected his escape, and as the gang had been kept in ignorance of the fact that there was a prisoner in the house if any of them had happened to notice a stranger in the neighborhood nothing would have been thought of the matter.

None of the gang though had seen any one, so it was plain that the prisoner had waited until darkness had set in, and then taken advantage of the gloom to make his escape.

It was arranged that Wellraven should remain at the tramp's retreat while the search was prosecuted.

Little time was wasted, and within five minutes from the time the three emerged from the cellar the pursuit began.

The tramps were well acquainted with all the roads in the neighborhood, and knew all the short cuts.

In this, as Bill, the Teaser, remarked, they had a decided advantage over the man of whom they were in chase.

It availed them naught though, for not the slightest trace could any of them discover of the fugitive.

In a couple of hours all had returned, and one and all told the same story—no clew!

"It is a blasted unlucky thing," the ruffian leader declared, "for the odds are big that this chap will get the officers arter us, and then this part of the country will be made too hot to be comfortable for gents of about our size."

"Very likely," Wellraven observed.

"We will have to hunt new holes," Bill, the Teaser, declared.

"We'll find 'em though, and then we'll go in for to make things hot for this feller."

"He thinks he's mighty smart, but we'll trip up his heels and down him in the long run."

Then Wellraven arranged so that the ruffians could communicate with him as soon as he got comfortably fixed in his new quarters, and after this was done took his departure.

"Fate itself seems to fight against me in this affair," the disguised millionaire muttered as he climbed into his buggy.

"This man who, like a specter, has sprung from the darkness of the past, is again at liberty to work me harm."

By this time he was on the road, the horse progressing at a brisk trot for Mamaronneck.

"Would it not be wise, instead of attempting to resist the blast like the oak, which oftentimes is overthrown by the hurricane, to bow before it like a reed?"

"Instead of fighting, would it not be wise for me to fly until the pursuit is given up?"

"In some foreign land I can find refuge. I am rich and what does it matter to me where I live?"

"My gold can produce comfort anywhere. That is by far the best course to adopt. Tomorrow I will seek safety in flight. No one will suspect the cause, and my affairs are all arranged so I can get away without any trouble."

"A sudden whim impels me to go abroad; that is the excuse. No one will suspect the true reason, and by the movement I set at naught the plans of my foe."

The idea was certainly feasible enough, and under the circumstances it seemed to be by far the best thing to be done.

Half-way between the tramps' retreat and the village, Wellraven encountered a covered wagon, such as are used by the traveling butchers in the rural districts, which seemed to be full of men.

There were six or eight in the wagon—fully as many as could be crowded into it, and as Wellraven cast a rapid glance at it as his vehicle went by the other, he fancied that some of the men in the interior of the wagon had guns.

The landlord of the depôt hotel, who also kept the principal livery-stable in the village, was driving, and by his side sat Justice Palmer.

The men who occupied the interior of the wagon he could not make out.

Wellraven passed the wagon, nodding as he did so, after the country fashion, confident that his disguise would prevent him from being recognized.

And then he fell to speculating in regard to why the wagon-load of men were abroad at such an hour.

"Do they mean to attack these outlaws? Has there been time for my man to reach the village and rouse the officers?"

A moment's reflection convinced him that there had been time.

"The game is up then as far as they are concerned, and all that is left for me is to take refuge in flight."

And after coming to this conclusion he applied the whip to his horse and drove on at the best speed of which the animal was capable.

Wellraven was right in his conjecture.

The wagon-load of men were on their way to attack the tramps in their stronghold, but the man who acted as guide to the expedition was not the dark-bearded stranger, but the jovial Western detective, Uncle Sun-Up.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HOT ON THE TRAIL.

WE will not attempt to mystify the reader though, nor seek to persuade him that the guess was not correct, when suspicion arose in his mind that the dark bearded stranger was Uncle Sun-Up in disguise.

This was the truth, but the disguise was so perfect that not a soul in the town suspected that the imposing-looking stranger was the rough-and-ready Westerner.

Bill, the Teaser, had guessed correctly in regard to the means by which his prisoner had escaped, and the moment he was at liberty, the Missourian hastened to the village, removed his disguise and appeared as Uncle Sun-Up once more.

Then he hunted up Justice Palmer, swore out a warrant, got a posse together, and started to arrest the tramps.

The acute detective knew that there wasn't any time to be lost, for after the experience of the night, it was reasonable to suppose that the tramps would lose no time in getting out of such a dangerous neighborhood.

He thought, though, they would hardly be apt to make a move before morning, for in the rural districts police matters do not move with the celerity with which they are prosecuted in the city, and, under ordinary circumstances, it would take fully four-and-twenty hours to get the machinery of the law in working order.

And so the attack was such a complete surprise, that the gang were captured at their fire before they could even attempt resistance.

Uncle Sun-Up disposed his men so as to surround the ruffians, and when the posse advanced from the gloom, the most of them armed with double-barreled shot-guns, a weapon far more likely to prove dangerous in the hands of the average man than a revolver or rifle, the outlaws, although at first disposed to show fight, speedily recognized the fact that if they attempted to resist it would be sure to cost some of them their lives, reluctantly gave up their arms and surrendered.

"What the blazes do you mean by this 'ere work?" Bill, the Teaser, demanded, angrily, as Uncle Sun-Up snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

"The jig is up, Bill, my tulip, and the chances are good for you to stretch hemp. I want you for murder!"

The tramps stared, for being in ignorance of the bridge affair, they had no idea that their captain had run his neck into a halter.

On the way out all the particulars in regard to the finding of the tramp's body had been explained to the detective.

And this, coupled with what he knew, gave him a pretty good idea of what had occurred, and so acting on the favorite detective plan, he pretended to know everything.

"For murder?" cried Bill, amazed.

"Yes, for the murder of the man whom you assaulted on the bridge, and I say, old pard, I reckon you'll find I am going to make the highest bid of anybody mixed up in this affair, but it will not profit you much."

And Uncle Sun-Up laughed in the face of the ruffian as he spoke.

The scales fell from Bill's eyes all of a sudden. He recognized his late prisoner and understood how completely he was trapped.

And, like the majority of scoundrels, finding that he was in the net he was ready to make terms.

He offered to make a clean breast of it, provided the detective would promise to "go light" on him.

Uncle Sun-Up agreed, for he was in search of bigger game than this miserable scoundrel.

Of course Bill could not tell the name of the man who had employed him, but Uncle Sun-Up easily conjectured who it was, and resolved to lose no time in springing a trap upon him.

So, leaving the prisoners to the charge of the constables, he procured a horse from a neighboring farm-house and hurried back to the village.

He had resolved to take the bull by the horns—to play the spy upon Sound View Grange with the hope of discovering something that might aid him in his mission of vengeance.

He left the horse in the friendly shelter of a group of trees and then made his way into the grounds.

With all the caution of an Indian scout upon the war-path he approached the house.

The grounds were profusely ornamented with evergreen trees, single and in clumps.

The single trees were splendid specimens of their kind, towering to a great height in the air, and their spreading branches extended to the ground.

The trees grouped together were dwarf varieties which were only six or eight feet high and spreading their branches in proportion.

We have taken pains to describe these evergreens, for it was through the shelter afforded by them that the detective was enabled to make his way through the grounds, despite the fact that there was a bright moon whose rays illuminated the earth almost as fully as though it was daylight.

Uncle Sun-Up had not entered by the regular gate, for he was afraid that some one might be on the watch to prevent intrusion, but had scaled the wall at a remote part of the grounds.

This was not a difficult task for a man used to all sorts of muscular exercise.

As we have said, with all the caution of a scout upon the war-path the detective approached the house, taking advantage of the evergreens and the bushes to shield his approach.

Uncle Sun-Up's wild Western experience stood him in good stead upon this occasion, for, without the experience which he had gained upon the frontier, it would not have been possible for him to accomplish the feat.

When he got within a couple of hundred yards of the house his advance was brought to a sudden termination, for he made the discovery that there was something which looked like a man sitting upon an iron garden bench in front of the mansion.

"On the watch, by hookey!" Uncle Sun-Up exclaimed, as, peering through the branches of one of the evergreens of the clump, in the center of which he had taken refuge, he made this unwelcome discovery.

"Ain't much doubt on it, I swan!" he murmured.

"Not much chance for me to do anything until that cuss takes himself out of the way."

"But who is it?"

"Is it my man? Is it Benoni Wellraven himself?"

Eagerly through the spiny branches of the evergreens peered the born detective, anxious for an answer to the question.

But, as far as he could make out, it was not Benoni Wellraven.

"No, I reckon it ain't him," he muttered, after a long and earnest gaze.

The Western detective had the eyes of a hawk, but the man was sitting in such a way that only a part of his back could be seen, the rest of his person being concealed by a straggling bush which grew between the clump of evergreens in which Uncle Sun-Up had sought concealment and the garden chair upon which the man sat.

Uncle Sun-Up gazed around him and, to use the common saying, put on his thinking-cap.

There was another clump of evergreens about fifty feet away, not nearer the house, nor further from it, but almost in a direct line from the clump in which the detective had found concealment, but from this other clump a clear view of the man could be had.

"By scooting around and gitting inter that air bit of timber I would be able fer to see who this cuss is, for sure!" he murmured.

With the detective, ever prompt in all emergencies, to think was to act, and so he was soon in motion from the one place of concealment to the other.

He did not attempt to go in a direct line, however, for that would necessitate his crossing the open ground in the full glare of the moonlight, and he was far too cautious to do this.

He commenced the move by retreating, then, when he got in line with the other clump of evergreens, he advanced, taking advantage of the various trees and bushes which were in the way to afford him concealment.

Like a huge snake he wormed himself into the center of the evergreens, but just as he got into a position from which he could command a view of the man on the garden bench an unfortunate accident occurred.

His knee came in contact with a dry stick which snapped under the pressure with a report that in the still night air sounded almost as loud as a pistol-shot.

"Dog my cats!" muttered Uncle Sun-Up between his teeth, "if that ain't tarnal on-lucky!"

The man on the bench was on his feet in an instant, evidently alarmed by the sound.

And now that the detective had a good view of him he saw that it was the negro boy who had been employed by Benoni Wellraven, to play the spy upon him when, in the disguise of the dark-bearded stranger, he had called upon the millionaire.

"Darn that ape!" murmured the detective, as he beheld the negro spring to his feet and then turn and listen, apparently anxious to know what had caused the noise.

"If he takes the fancy into his head to come spying down hyer mebbe he will be able to smell me out. He ought not to be able to do so, 'cos I am hidden away in this timber as snugly as a bug in a rug, but sich apes as he is hev darned long smellers once in a while."

It was soon evident that the detective's suspicions in regard to the negro's intentions were correct, for after listening a moment he began to advance in the direction of the clump of evergreens in the center of which the detective was concealed.

He came slowly on and from the peculiar way in which he held his hand, back of him, under the skirt of his coat, Uncle Sun-Up got the idea that he was armed with a pistol.

"Got a pistle thar—a revolver, mebbe," soliloquized the detective, watching his approach with the eyes of a hawk.

"Well, he don't want to draw no pistle on me,

if he knows when it is healthy for himself," Uncle Sun-Up continued.

"Gosh! I would choke the ape so quick that he wouldn't be apt to know what hurt him!"

On came the negro.

Gifted like the most of his race with a remarkably fine ear, he had rightly located the direction from whence the noise had come, but when he had advanced a couple of hundred feet he halted, thinking the sound came from amid a clump of small bushes a little to the right.

The direction from whence the sound had come he guessed all right, but the distance puzzled him.

When he approached the bushes he drew forth the pistol, and, as Uncle Sun-Up had anticipated, it was a revolver.

He raised the hammer, all ready for action, and then made a thorough examination of the bushes.

Of course he found nothing, a circumstance which made the born detective grin.

The negro was not exactly satisfied though, and shook his head with a puzzled air.

"I reckon I dunno 'zactly w'ot dat air was," he remarked.

And then he looked around him as though he was meditating making a further examination, and despite Uncle Sun-Up's undoubted nerve, he began to be a little uneasy.

"It would be pesky ugly if that tanned American of African descent should run foul of me, hiding hyer," he murmured.

"I reckon it would kinder put me to my trumps for to find a reasonable excuse, 'cos it don't look to be just the cheese for a stranger to be prowling around in the bushes hiding in a man's grounds."

"Pears kinder as if he was arter the spoons, or some other valuables."

"Mebbe it was a skunk arter de chickens!" exclaimed the negro aloud, just as Uncle Sun-Up came to his conclusion.

"I heerd de coachman say dat dere was one 'round las' night."

"Dat's it, shure as ye'r' born! It was a skunk arter de chickens, an' he see'd mo up dar on de bench, an' dat made him cut his lucky."

At this moment the door of the mansion opened, and the master of it, Benoni Wellraven, appeared.

He was bare-headed, and when he saw the negro he made a sign to him.

"Yes, sah," exclaimed the servant, starting toward his master, but was stayed by Wellraven.

"Remain where you are," he said, "I prefer to speak with you there."

The negro halted, and the millionaire descended the steps, and advanced until he reached his side.

The two were so near to the clump of bushes, in which Uncle Sun-Up was concealed, that he was sure he could overhear every word of the conversation, unless they spoke in whispers, and this he judged they were hardly likely to do, for it was not possible that Benoni Wellraven, who would of course set the pitch of the conversation, would be apt to be apprehensive there was any one in the neighborhood who would play the spy upon him.

Eager was the interest with which the born detective surveyed the millionaire.

He could plainly see that the man had aged dreadfully in the last few days.

Fully five years older he appeared, and there was a nervous look upon his face, as though he dreaded danger from some unexpected quarter.

"Are you armed?" were the first words he spoke.

"Yes, sah."

"And you will not be afraid to use your weapon if the circumstance so demands?"

"No indeedy, sah," responded the black, assuming the show of a courage which he was far from possessing.

"Tis well. I want you to mount guard on the road about a quarter of a mile from the house, just where my private road joins the main thoroughfare."

"Yes, sah, I know de place."

"If any one approaches—no matter who, I wish you to discharge your revolver. If there is one man fire one shot, two men, two shots; and if there is a party, with Justice Palmer, or any of the other magistrates of the town, fire all the barrels as rapidly as you can, and then make your escape so that they will not be able to discover the meaning of the firing, for it is a little joke I wish to play upon them."

"Yes, sah, I'll do it."

"Away with you then."

The negro saluted, then took his departure, and Wellraven returned to the house.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CAPTURE.

"ANA! I guess his scheme," Uncle Sun-Up exclaimed, the moment the form of the millionaire disappeared within the mansion.

"He fears that the lightning is about to strike, and is preparing to evade the blow by flight, but I'll be on hand to put salt on his tail."

Then, leaving his ambush, he stole cautiously around to the side of the house.

"Hold on a moment!" the Westerner exclaimed abruptly, coming to a halt. "Lemme figger on this hyar thing a leetle."

"Wellraven is going to make a bolt—there isn't any doubt about that. He sees the net is gathering closer and closer around him, and realizes that the only chance for him is to take French leave."

"He will probably go to-night; sneak out and take that late train, but he is a leetle afraid that I will set the machinery of the law in motion, and so he has put the nigger on the watch—a capital idea, for when the officers come, he will be warned in ample time to escape."

"He has probably got a sail-boat all ready, and as there is a good breeze blowing, if he once succeeds in getting on board of her, he could bid defiance to pursuit, for the time being."

"I instructed Palmer to meet me hyer with the officers at eleven o'clock. I allowed plenty of time for me to work my game all right."

"Now, then, my fust trick will be to look after the sail-boat, and fix it so that it can't be used."

Cautiously, then, after coming to this conclusion, Uncle Sun Up made his way to the water's edge.

As he had anticipated, a cat-boat was there, with the sail hoisted, tugging away at her anchorage, thirty feet from the shore.

A skiff, with oars in it, was tied to the little dock, so that access to the sail-boat was easy.

The Westerner got in the skiff, and with due caution paddled out to the cat-boat.

With his knife he cut the halyards which sustained the sail, nearly through, so that they would be sure to part the moment any strain was put upon them.

"There! I reckon that is a good job!" he exclaimed, in a satisfied tone. "Just as soon as he attempts to get under way, his sail will come down with a run, and then he can be overhauled by any row-boat."

"And now what is the next p'int?" he continued, in a questioning tone.

"The nigger must be secured, for it is important that he should not give the alarm when Palmer comes."

"I have already had one tussle with the fellow, coming out first best, and as I didn't have any trouble in working the trick that time, I ought to be able to put it through now."

"He is to keep watch at the junction of Wellraven's private road with the main one," the bloodhound continued, in a reflective way.

"If I remember the location rightly there is considerable shrubbery in the neighborhood, so I will, probably, be able to get at the darky without much trouble, for he will never expect that any danger will threaten him from the rear, and all his attention will be given to the main road."

Having come to this conclusion Uncle Sun Up proceeded to the execution of his scheme, moving forward with the caution of a red Indian stealing upon his prey.

His thought in regard to the trees was right; the private road was fringed with them, and where it joined the main avenue, heavy clumps of bushes grew in luxuriant profusion.

Thanks to the cover thus offered him, the human bloodhound was able to get within fifty feet of the negro without the latter having his suspicions aroused.

As Uncle Sun Up had surmised, the watcher did not expect that any one would approach from the rear, and so was devoting all his attention to gazing up the main road, looking toward Mamaroneck.

The entrance to the private road was marked by two massive stones, one placed on each side of it, and upon one of these stones the negro had seated himself.

The night was not dark, so the Westerner was able to distinguish him without difficulty.

The boy had the revolver in his lap, and every now and then he grasped it and took aim up the road.

As the Westerner made his stealthy way toward the boy, he could hear him talking to himself.

"Ole massa knows dat I am de coon dat he trust!" the negro exclaimed in a boastful way.

"He knows dat I am like de weassel an' allers sleep wid one eye open."

Then he chuckled for a few moments in great glee, and all the while Uncle Sun Up was slowly drawing nearer and nearer to him, moving now with the utmost caution, for the Westerner was a master of prairie craft and he understood that a single careless movement on his part would surely betray to the negro that he was in the neighborhood, and then all hope of surprising the boy would be gone.

It was important above all things that the negro should not give an alarm, as such a thing would upset all the carefully-formed plans of the man-hunter.

The Westerner managed his approach so well that he got within ten feet of the negro without the latter's suspicions being aroused, and then, revolvers in hand, raising the hammer of the weapon with a sharp click as he moved, Old Sun Up stepped out into the road.

The negro was taken completely by surprise; the first indication he had that any one was in

the neighborhood was the sharp click of the revolver followed immediately by the stern warning:

"Don't move or you are a dead nigger!"

So startling was the surprise that the negro fairly gasped with amazement as he turned his head and fixed his eyes upon the stern countenance of the Westerner.

His hand still grasped the butt of the revolver but he did not attempt to raise the weapon.

"You understand the situation, I reckon. I have got you foul and if you know what is good for yourself you will not try to show fight, for if you do you will be sure to get the worst of it!" Uncle Sun Up declared.

This warning was hardly needed though, as the negro was an arrant coward, and had no idea of offering any resistance.

If he had been so situated that he could have banged away at the stranger with his pistol and then had a chance to take to his heels, with a fair prospect of getting off, he might have done so, but when it came to a hand-to-hand fight, at close quarters with a man as well armed as himself, and superior in personal strength in every way, the boy had no notion of trying any such game.

He glared at the stranger in alarm, rolling up his eyes until nothing but the whites were visible.

"Say, you want to be keeful, white man," he stammered. "Don't p'int dat pistle right at dis yere nigger's head, 'cos it might go off."

This speech satisfied the man-hunter that the negro had no intention of offering resistance.

"Oh, that is all right!" Uncle Sun Up exclaimed. "Don't you worry yourself about that. There isn't any danger of the gun barking so long as you behave yourself, but if you should take into your head to be ugly then Wellraven would have a dead nigger to plant, and I don't believe he is banking for any job of the kind, either, for jest now I reckon he has all he kin do to attend to his own affairs."

"Don't you worry 'bout dat, massa man, I isn't de kind of coon for to try any foolishness!" the fellow asserted, his courage returning now that he found there was a chance for him to escape from this unpleasant situation without sustaining material damage.

"That is good!" Uncle Sun Up responded. "That shows that your head is screwed on all right, and I like to do business with men who have sense enough to know when they find themselves in a tight place."

"You kin bet yer sweet life, massa, dat I am jist dat kind of a nigger!" the boy asserted. "I ain't anxious for to quarrel, an' ain't sick enuff for to need any leaden pills."

And then the negro grinned as though he thought he had made an extremely witty remark.

"Your head is level, and there's no two ways about it!" the Westerner remarked.

"What can't be cured must be endured," he continued, with the air of a sage. "And when a man finds he is in a tight place, if he is wise, he will eddeavor to get out of it with as little trouble as possible."

"Dat is de kind of coon I am!" the negro assented. "And you kin bet a small farm, boss, dat I ain't gwine to make no trouble."

"Good boy!" exclaimed the man-hunter, approvingly. "And seeing that you are so sensible I reckon I will have to trouble you to hand over that leetle pop-gun."

"Dat is all right, but dis yere gun belongs to Massa Wellraven," the boy replied, evidently reluctant to give up the weapon.

"Yes, I know all about that, but it doesn't make any difference, sonny; I reckon I kin take keer of the gun jest as well as you kin, and as your boss is an old pard of mine he will not mind my having the we'pon."

"Tain't nuffin' to me, yo' know, but I don't want for to do anything for to make the boss mad at me," the negro protested.

"I will make that all right for you," the man-hunter replied.

"When I see Wellraven I will explain that I persuaded you to intrust the gun to me; so hand it over without any more talk, for I think we have had quite enough chin-music about the thing now."

The accents of stern command were in the voice of the Westerner and the negro did not dare to hesitate longer.

"All right; jest as you say, boss," he rejoined, passing over the revolver. "I want to see what is jest right, you know, an' keep out of trouble."

"I understand, but don't you worry about that. If you will do as I tell you, you will find that everything will be all right."

"I hope to goodness dat it will, massa, for dat is jest wot I want."

Uncle Sun Up stowed the revolver away in his pocket.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you; Mr. Wellraven has changed his mind about your keeping watch here."

The negro looked astonished.

"You see I know all about the matter," the Westerner continued with a grin. "I am one of the kind of men who contrive to keep pretty well posted, but that is a part of my business," and then Uncle Sun Up opened his coat and

displayed to the astonished eyes of the negro a silver badge with the word, Detective, emblazoned upon it.

"I reckon that you understand the leetle game that I am up to!" he remarked.

"Yes, sah," the negro said, displaying decided alarm.

"But, I say, boss, you ain't arter me for nuffin' are you? 'cos I sw'ar to goodness that I ain't been mixed up in no trouble."

"Oh, no, that is all right. I reckon you ain't wanted, but things have turned out so I will have to git you out of the way for a while," the Westerner remarked.

"W'ot is dat for, boss?" the other asked, profoundly astonished.

"Oh, wa-al, now, I can't give that away!" Uncle Sun Up declared.

"You mustn't ask sich questions, but do jest as I tell yer, and keep yer mouth shut."

"All right, sah, I will do jest as you tell me for sure!" the negro replied.

Then the Westerner cast his eyes around in a reflective way until his gaze rested on the shanty erected to shelter the laborers' horses and carts.

"What is that shebang over thar?" he asked.

"Dat is whar de contractor, w'ot is doing some work for de boss, keeps his t'ings."

"That will answer furst rate, I reckon!" the man-hunter observed in a meditative way.

"S'pose you come over with me and we will take a look at the shanty."

The negro wondered greatly at this, but had been inspired with such a wholesome fear of the other that he did not dare to offer an objection, so he said he was ready to go.

The rude structure was divided into compartments, all of which were guarded by secure locks, with the exception of one at the extreme end of the building, which had a hasp and staple, but the padlock was missing.

"Now this will answer nicely, I reckon, the man-hunter remarked as he opened the door and looked in.

The negro stared, but did not say anything, for he hadn't an idea in regard to the other's meaning.

"Yes, sir, this will fill the bill exactly," Uncle Sun Up observed.

"Now then, boy, I will have to trouble you to go in hyer."

"W'ot dat?" cried the other in profound amazement.

"I said for you to go in hyer."

"Bress my soul w'ot's dat for?" asked the negro, rolling up his eyes in amazement, as he stared first at the Westerner and then into the dark stable.

"Never you mind what it is for. That is my business, and not yours," the man-hunter retorted, sharply.

"You're only joking, I reckon, boss!" the boy declared, totally perplexed.

"Nary joke!" Uncle Sun Up replied, curtly. "I never indulge in any sich foolishness when I have business on hand."

"It is necessary for the success of a little scheme which I have on hand, for you to go into this stable, and stay there until I call upon you to come out."

"I shall put the hasp up and fasten it with one of these spikes,"—and the speaker pointed to some rusty spikes lying on the ground near the door—"so that if anybody comes prowling around the stable, they will not have any suspicion thar is anybody inside, seeing that all the doors are fastened."

The darky stared; this mystery puzzled him.

"Bress my soul!" he exclaimed. "Does yer t'ink, boss, dat dar will be anybody come to de stable?"

"Wa-al, thar's no telling, you know," the Westerner replied, with a weighty shake of the head.

"Thar's a heap of bad men, tramps and sich like, a-roaming 'round loose nowadays, and a man never knows what will happen, so it is always best to be on the safe side."

"You jest go in byer and keep your eyes open from now until midnight, and if anybody comes prowling 'round, trying the doors, don't you say a word until they git the door open, then you kin yell like all possessed, and I will be down on the men like a thousand of bricks!"

The negro shook his head, and from the look upon his face it was plain that he did not admire this programme.

"By golly! s'pose dis yere gang go in for to lay me out?" he exclaimed. "Hadn't yo' better dun give me back de pistle, so I kin make a fight if de fellers come?"

"Oh, no, you don't want to shoot them, you know; that isn't the game a tall," Uncle Sun Up replied.

"It is my scheme to catch the fellows right in the act, and you need not be skeered about anything happening to you, for I will be right in the neighborhood, and I will nab the cusses afore they kin do any damage."

"Dat is all right, boss, I s'pose," the negro observed slowly. "But I would feel a heap sight safer if I had de pistle."

"Don't you worry; you will not be in any danger, for I will nab the galoots afore they have a chance to turn their hands over!" the Westerner declared.

"I don't want to be killed, yo' know, without a chance for a fight."

"That is all right! I will look out for you," the man-hunter asserted. "Take one of the picks in thar for a we'pon, but I will nab the cusses the moment they make a break."

And then he fairly shoved the negro into the stable, put up the hasp and fastened it with a spike.

CHAPTER XL.

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL.

UNCLE SUN UP turned away chuckling softly to himself.

"Oho!" he muttered. "I think I have fixed the ducky so that he will not be able to give any alarm, therefore that little scheme of Benoni Wellraven is knocked in the head."

"Despite the care which Wellraven took to prevent a surprise the road is now open for the officers to reach the house."

"There will not be any difficulty in passing the porter, for he knows who Justice Palmer is, and would not dare to go to the length of refusing him admission, particularly when he announces that he has come to see the master of the mansion on important business."

"All goes well, and before midnight Benoni Wellraven will be in the net which will only open to permit him to step upon the scaffold, where the hangman's noose waits for him."

By this time the Westerner was some fifty feet from the stables, and had halted amid some evergreens from which he could command a view of the lordly mansion of the man against whom he was plotting so deeply.

"The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceeding fine! It is an old adage but a true one, and though for twenty odd years you have succeeded in escaping the punishment of crimes, Benoni Wellraven, yet now at last retribution comes!"

Then a slight noise came to his ears.

He was all attention in a moment.

"Aha! some one is coming along the road, and proceeding cautiously too, as though desirous of not attracting attention."

Down on his hands and knees the man-hunter dropped amid the evergreens, which afforded ample concealment, and yet he could peer through the branches and command a view of the road.

Almost immediately the wayfarer came in sight.

He was skulking along the road in a regular tramp-like fashion, and there was light enough to enable the watcher to surmise that he was poorly dressed.

He was not a gentleman, that was plainly evident, and he was skulking along in a fashion which suggested a tramp bent on some unlawful purpose.

When he came to the private road he halted for a moment and cast a suspicious glance around.

"Oho! he is up to some mischief, I will bet a hat!" Uncle Sun Up exclaimed.

Having apparently satisfied himself that the coast was clear, the stranger went on his way up the private road toward Wellraven's mansion.

"Come, now! I reckon it will be worth my while to keep an eye on this chap!" the Westerner muttered.

"The chances are about a hundred to one, it seems to me, that he isn't up to any good, but I must say that I am considerably puzzled as to what game he is going to play."

"But I am arter you, my man, and I will stick to you like your shadow until I tumble to your leetle racket."

And acting on this resolve, Uncle Sun Up followed the stranger. He did not take to the road though, but stole along the fields, taking advantage of trees and shrubbery.

This tracking the Westerner performed so skillfully that though the man he was trailing so persistently turned his head three or four times—through excess of caution as it would seem—he was not able to detect that he was being shadowed.

When the man arrived at the porter's lodge he came to a halt and listened intently.

The grounds were guarded by a high iron picket fence, and as all the gates were shut and locked, entrance to the domain was not to be had.

"Now, then, what in the name of wonder is the fellow up to?" Uncle Sun Up muttered to himself, as he watched the man's movements.

The fellow had placed his ear to the keyhole of the door of the lodge, and was apparently listening.

The Westerner took advantage of this fact to creep stealthily forward until he was within a hundred feet of the man.

The porter had not gone to bed, it was evident, for the windows of the house were brilliantly illuminated.

For a couple of minutes the stranger listened at the door, then he resumed an upright position, and took another careful glance around, which caused Uncle Sun Up to mutter:

"That critter is up to some deviltry as sure as shooting!

"He would never be so blamed anxious to see whether there was anybody around or not, if he wasn't."

Although the Westerner was within a hundred feet of the man, yet, owing to the fact that the porter's lodge was shaded by trees, the man-hunter was not really able to get as good a view of the fellow as he had obtained when the man was skulking along the road; but for all that the longer Uncle Sun Up watched him the greater became his conviction that the man was an old acquaintance.

Then, after completing his survey of the neighborhood, the man nodded his head in a satisfied way, and knocked loudly on the door of the lodge.

The Westerner, watching the illuminated window, could plainly distinguish the figure of a man rising from a chair and going toward the door.

The portal was guarded by a chain and bolt, so the door could be only opened a few inches, and in the space the face of the old Irishman appeared.

"Here's a letter for you, Mr. Doolin," said the stranger, in tones which immediately revealed to Uncle Sun Up who he was.

The Irishman put out his hand to take the letter which the other tendered, and at the same moment the stranger hit him a violent blow on the head with a sand-club, which knocked the porter over on his back.

This movement was performed so quickly that even the acute man-hunter was taken by surprise.

The assailant was prompt to improve his advantage.

He passed his hand into the apartment and unfastened the chain which secured the door, so he could enter.

And the moment he gained admittance he sprang forward, drawing a stout cord from his pocket, and tied the arms and legs of the porter, who had been knocked into insensibility by the blow, and then, in a very dextrous manner, he inserted a gag in the mouth of the Irishman, thus rendering him completely helpless.

When the task was completed, he rose to his feet and looked down complacently upon the prostrate man.

"There, I think I have got you all right," he said.

"You will not be apt to make any trouble until some one comes and gets you out of this scrape."

"And now the road is open for me to pay a visit to the mansion. If I am as lucky in gaining admission there as I have been here, I shall consider myself exceedingly fortunate, and if I can only get at Benoni Wellraven, what a surprise party it will be for him!"

"That is so, and no mistake!" Uncle Sun Up exclaimed at this point.

The stranger started in astonishment, turned, thrusting his hand into his pocket as he did so, as if to grasp a weapon.

But he found himself "covered" by a revolver in the hands of the Westerner, and a caution came quickly from the lips of Uncle Sun Up.

"Don't try to pull a gun, Tom, for it will not do you any good. I have got the 'drop' on you, as we say out West, and if you go to showing fight I shall have to plug you."

"Is it you, Gil Featherstone?" the man exclaimed, vastly astonished.

"Yes, I am here, Tom La Porte, as large as life and twice as natural."

The stranger was the man whom the Westerner had encountered on the first night of his sojourn in New York.

"Blamed if I didn't think a cop had tumbled to my little game!" La Porte declared. "And yet, I didn't see how the thing could have been worked, for I have managed the trick right up to the handle."

"It was accidental alone which gave you away," the Westerner explained. "I had no notion of seeing you in this neighborhood."

"And what are you doing here, anyway?" asked the other, abruptly.

"And I might put the same question to you," the Westerner rejoined.

"Well, I don't mind telling you, seeing that you are already posted as to the game," said the other, after reflecting on the matter for a moment.

"This is Benoni Wellraven's country seat, you know."

"Yes, I am aware of the fact."

"And I hate Benoni Wellraven from the very bottom of my heart!" the New Yorker cried, in savage tones.

"I am aware that there isn't any love lost between you."

"He is rich and powerful, while I am poor, friendless, and miserable!"

"Quite a contrast!"

"And I hold him to be in a great measure responsible for my present condition, but he laughs at the idea that I have any claim upon him, and he has threatened to give me in charge of the police if I dared to come and annoy him by asking for money."

"Well, that is considerable of a threat," the Westerner remarked, in a reflective way.

"And there is no doubt in my mind that he

would not hesitate a moment in executing such a threat either," La Porte declared, angrily.

"He has always been one of the bulldozing kind—a man inclined to carry matters with a high hand."

"Yes, he was always a high-flyer."

"I have got down to about the last ditch, and am in such a condition of mind that I am reckless in regard to what becomes of me. I cannot be much worse off than I am now, no matter what happens, and have come to the conclusion that I might as well be dead as alive."

"Well, I don't know about that," Uncle Sun Up remarked, soberly.

"It is a long lane which has no turning, you know, and no matter how down on his luck a man may be, there is always a chance that the prospect may improve."

"There isn't much for me. I have just come out of the hospital, and the doctors say I have heart disease and am liable to drop dead at any moment."

"That is bad."

"I believe these doctors know what they are talking about, and so when I came to consider that I was likely to hop the twig at any moment, I just made up my mind that I wouldn't lose any time in getting square with this scoundrel of a Wellraven."

"Under the circumstances it was only natural you should thirst for vengeance; for you consider Wellraven to be responsible for your downfall."

"Yes, I do, for it was he who first tempted me into crime. I was wild and reckless, drank more than was good for me and associated with bad companions, but I never really committed any act calculated to bring down upon me the law's avenging hand until Benoni Wellraven dazed my senses with his gold. He paid me to ruin an innocent man, and by the act I also ruined myself, for I have never been able to hold up my head since."

"Yes, there is no doubt that when you allowed Wellraven to tempt you into crime it was about the same as signing your own death-warrant."

"But things don't work the way they ought to in this world!" La Porte exclaimed, angrily.

"Here have I been living a wretched life for the last ten or fifteen years, while this hound of a Wellraven has been basking in all the luxuries of fortune."

"I have been brooding over the thing until I have got so desperate that I would be willing to give my own life to get square with Wellraven."

"And you have come here to-night with that idea?"

"Yes; I thought over the matter until it seemed as if I should go crazy unless I satisfied my revenge."

"I was well acquainted with all the arrangements of this place, for on my last trip here, when I came to bore Wellraven for money, I took care to look around, for I had an idea then that I might some time want to pay a midnight visit here."

"You caught the porter without any trouble."

"I had it in for him!" the New Yorker exclaimed, grimly.

"The last time I was here he threatened to set the dogs on me because I insisted on seeing his master, but now I think I have squared that account."

"Your idea was, I suppose, to force an entrance into the mansion so as to secure an interview with Wellraven?"

"Yes, and I had made up my mind that if he was not willing to pay me a good big sum of money I would kill him on the spot, even though I risked the hangman's rope."

"You cannot work the trick," Uncle Sun Up remarked.

"I have marked Wellraven for my prey, and I am not willing to give him up to you."

"How is that?" La Porte inquired in amazement.

"I want the man for murder; he has dipped his hands in blood, and I have been lucky enough to weave a web around him which will surely bring his feet to the scaffold."

"Is it possible?"

"It is! So you must leave him to me. Already the officers have been notified to arrest him, and I am waiting here, keeping watch, so he will not escape before they come."

"So long as he is punished I am satisfied."

"Here is a twenty-dollar note," said the Westerner giving it to the other.

"Go back to New York and come to me at the Metropolitan Hotel to-morrow. You were good to the widow and the orphan, and charity of that kind covers a multitude of sins."

A few broken words of thanks came from the other and then he slunk away.

But, never again in life were the two to meet. La Porte stopped at some of the low drinking dens of the town, imbibed to excess, then, being late for the train, essayed to get on board while it was in motion and died beneath the wheels!

After the New Yorker departed, the Westerner placed the porter on the bed so that he would be comfortable, closed the lodge door, and then advanced with cautious steps toward the house.

Not a light was visible, excepting one which burned in a closely-curtained room on the first floor.

The detective had taken means to familiarize himself with the plan of the house, and he knew that this room was the library.

Uncle Sun-Up concealed himself in a clump of evergreens near this part of the house.

There was a man moving about within the room, for ever and anon his shadow fell upon the curtain.

It was a warm night—the air still and calm, hardly a breath stirring.

And as the detective lay in ambush he fancied he heard footsteps in the distance: at the same moment Wellraven came to one of the windows—they were long ones extending to the ground—and opened it.

The sound of footsteps also came to him.

"Who can be abroad at this hour?" he mused, and with the words he came through the window and walked a short distance down the lawn toward the sea-wall, from whence the sound of the footsteps seemed to come.

This was a golden opportunity for the detective, and he hastened to improve it.

A wild desire had seized upon him to get into the house.

Despite the risk which attended the attempt he made it.

The movement was successful, and in the library was a convenient closet which afforded him a hiding-place.

Hardly had he gained the closet when Wellraven reentered the room, and the rustle of a woman's dress told that he had a companion. Wellraven was careful to fasten the window, and then he bade his visitor be seated.

"You are entirely unexpected, Adrienne," the millionaire said.

Uncle Sun-Up was amazed.

This was the missing girl.

"Yes, but I could not bear the load that I am carrying any longer! I feel that I must have relief or else I shall go crazy!" responded the other, in girlish tones.

It was as much as the concealed detective could do to repress a start of surprise, for the voice was familiar to him.

It was the girl, Maggie Rivers, who had accepted his protection, who spoke.

All the while he had been engaged in the search for the missing girl he had her sheltered under his own roof. But as she had altered her appearance so materially by changing the color of her hair she was not recognized.

"What do you mean? I do not understand," came in calm and measured tones from the lips of the millionaire.

"That is why I came to you to-night—to explain and also to warn you."

"To warn me? To warn me of what?"

"Listen, and you will understand!" cried the girl, impetuously, and from the tone in which she spoke it was plain that she was the prey to the most terrible excitement.

"For the last six months that miserable wretch, Wellington, has in secret annoyed me with his attentions."

"I did not say anything about it for I did not think the subject worthy of mention. At last though he excited my attention, for he told me that there was a mystery connected with my birth which he could solve."

"I knew that there was a mystery, for your wife, who was to me all that a mother could be, had told me so, and also promised to reveal it to me, but death struck her down before she could speak."

"Eager to hear the story I agreed to cross the water in my boat some pleasant evening to his house. By this means I could avoid observation."

"I did so, and a terrible story he told to me."

"He said that my true name was Mary Chadbourne, and that I was the daughter of a man named Christopher Chadbourne, who, by your agency, had been unjustly accused, committed and sent to State Prison where he had died."

"This was because you coveted his wife, and after the death of my unfortunate father, my mother, after some years, married the villain who had sent him to his untimely doom, of course ignorant of what a wretch she was wedding."

"To avoid the stigma of the past she took a false name, and it was pretended that I, her child, was the daughter of another."

"My adopted mother was in truth my real mother."

"And then he further said it was your scheme to marry me in time; but he, Wellington, would prevent that, for you were in his power, and would not dare to anger him."

"Bewildered, I knew not what to say; then he declared I should have proof of the truth of the story, and he concealed me in a closet, and then, in a short time, you came."

"I overheard all that passed between you two. How you were in his power, and had found all the money upon which he lived, and that if he chose he could send you to State Prison."

"You spoke smoothly to him, then took advantage of his back being turned, while he was at his safe, to strike him with a knife."

"Then you took from the safe all the papers which related to yourself, and departed."

"I, like one bereft of reason, determined to run away, for I felt I could not live in the same house with a murderer, and yet I hated to bring you to the scaffold."

"I disguised myself, walked to New Rochelle, and there took the train for New York. There I would have sought forgetfulness in the river, had not a kindly hand rescued me. But I can bear the suspense no longer. I must speak out, and my purpose here to-night is to bid you to escape before I tell my tale."

CHAPTER XLI. BLOOD FOR BLOOD.

THERE was a deep silence for a few moments, and then the heavy breathing of the two actors in this strange scene could be distinctly heard by the detective.

At last Wellraven spoke.

"It is useless for me to attempt to deny my guilt," he said.

"All I have to urge in extenuation is that I loved your mother with a passion more akin to madness than aught else."

"She preferred to wed your father, who was only a poor clerk, than to accept the suit of a man who had the promise of vast wealth."

"I schemed and plotted, and, with the aid of this wretch of a Wellington, contrived to get your father in the meshes of the law."

"He suffered for the crimes committed by Wellington and myself, and, after his supposed death in the State Prison, I won your mother's consent to marry me. I say supposed death, for I have never believed him to be dead. I always believed he escaped, and that one day he would return to call me to an account."

"In fact, I think there are detectives on my track now, and if there are, to one man alone am I indebted for it."

"As to the fatal blow which slew Benjamin Wellington I have no excuse to offer, except that I was tired of the yoke under which I labored."

"For years I paid him a certain sum which he squandered in wild debauchery, and at last his demands became too great, and in a moment of desperation I struck the blow which ended my slavery."

"I have no excuses to make. For years I have suffered the torments of the souls who dwell in everlasting fires and had as lief die as live."

"There is some of the pride of my race left yet, though, and that alone has prevented me from acknowledging my guilt or from taking my own life."

"It is not proper that a Wellraven should die the death of a felon on the scaffold, nor would I have the eyes of the world tempted to gaze into my life by rashly rushing into another world."

"But in regard to flight that is exactly what I have made up my mind was the proper course for me to pursue."

"I feel that the meshes of an invisible web are gathering around me, and that if I do not escape my secret, unrelenting enemy by a speedy flight there is no hope for me."

"All my preparations are complete, and to-morrow I shall set out. I shall put an ocean between me and this secret foe who has filled me with so much dread, and never in life will I return to this land."

"I accomplished my object; I won the woman whom I coveted in spite of all the obstacles which stood in my way, but the fruits of my victory were Dead Sea apples which turned to ashes in my mouth."

"Not a single moment of peace have I known; never was there a triumph more dearly bought."

"As a tardy reparation to you, though, for the wrong which I have done you I have arranged that a certain sum shall be paid you yearly, and at my death a handsome fortune will come to you; the balance of my wealth I give to charity."

"I am humbled to the ground by the weight of my sin, but yet I am man enough to wish to baffle the enemy who so persistently seeks to destroy me."

"In spite of his bloodhound-like pursuit I shall triumph over him."

"Oh, no!" responded Uncle Sun-Up in a stern voice, as he came stalking like an avenging specter into the light.

"You will not escape. I have heard your confession and you are fairly trapped!"

Benoni Wellraven sunk into a chair totally unmanned by the unexpected appearance.

"My thought was right—you have come to hunt me to my doom!" he exclaimed.

"You are right! Even if the blood of Christopher Chadbourne is not on your hands, the death of the unfortunate man whom you shot, thinking it was me, lies at your door, also the death of Wellington."

"Your tools are captured and they have made a full confession."

"But my thought was right—you are Christopher Chadbourne!" Wellraven cried.

"I am; and your father, girl! A merciful Providence directed you to me when you were

about to extinguish your life in the dark waters."

She hastened to his arms.

Wellraven groaned in agony and buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, father, have mercy on this unfortunate man!" she cried.

"It is too late," responded Wellraven. "I have taken poison, and so escape the felon's doom!"

It was the truth, and ten minutes later the soul of the guilty man fled.

Our story is now told.

Vengeance had been done, although the world knew it not, for the secret was not made public.

The girl was Wellraven's heiress, as he had said, and this wealth she entreated her new-found father to share, but he would have none of it.

"Oh, no; I'm off for the West," he replied, "where I have carved out a new destiny. The honest folks out there would be lonesome without Uncle Sammy Sun-Up!"

THE END.

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